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## DETECTIVE BURR THE HEADQUARTERS SPECIAL



OR,  
**The Great Shadower's  
Baffling Case.**

A Story of False Clues and a Woman's Art,

BY HAROLD PAYNE,  
AUTHOR OF "DETECTIVE BURR'S SEVEN CLUES,"  
"THAD BURR, THE INVINCIBLE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

GROPING IN THE DARK.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"Exactly what you said it was—a Chinese puzzle—if there ever was one."

The first speaker was inspector Ryndes, and the second Thaddeus Burr, the Headquarters Special.

The latter had just finished the perusal of a letter which the inspector had handed him to read, and looked up at the inspector when he gave utterance to the interrogation.

Whether the letter was a Chinese puzzle, as the

NO WONDER THE DESIGNING WOMAN WAS HORRIFIED. "DEAD!" EXCLAIMED THE  
DISGUISED THAD, NOW STANDING OVER THE BODY.



detective had described it to be or not, certainly the speaker's face was as he dropped his eyes once more upon the written page before him.

The inspector laughed dryly at Thad's remark, and resumed:

"Yes, Thad, my boy, it is a puzzle for a fact. And I do not know of any one more capable of unraveling it than yourself."

"It seems strange they should have allowed the matter to run on so long without investigating it," remarked Thad. "According to this letter the murder has been committed for more than a year, and the suspected party tried and acquitted. I should think that ought to satisfy them under ordinary circumstances."

"It probably would under ordinary circumstances, but these are extraordinary circumstances."

"How so?"

"As you see by the letter," began the inspector, tipping his chair back into a more comfortable position, closing one eye and puffing comfortably at his cigar, "the present investigation is sought by the man who has just been tried for the murder and acquitted."

"So I see," interposed Thad, "and that is what adds to the mystery of the case. Having been tried and acquitted, one would naturally suppose that he had enough of the affair, and would wish to wash his hands of it."

"As I said before, he probably would under ordinary circumstances. But this is not."

"Well?"

"The trial has not just recently closed, as the letter would lead you to believe, but was concluded some three months ago. The accused, Eldridge Mortimer, as we have seen, was tried and acquitted for want of sufficient evidence. He is a young man and a physician. Prior to the unfortunate affair which put him on trial for his life Mortimer had a fine practice in the village of Plainfield, where the murder was committed. His arrest and trial were based entirely upon circumstantial evidence and, while the prosecution failed to find him guilty, the public has not altered its original verdict—that he was a murderer—and the result is that he is ostracized, or to use a more modern phrase, boycotted in the village and vicinity to such an extent that it is not only extremely disagreeable to live there, but about impossible for him to earn a living, as nobody will employ him. Hence his desire to have the mystery cleared up and the real culprit brought, to justice if possible, that he may stand as an innocent man before the world."

"What are the circumstances, inspector, as far as you know?"

"Why, it appears that young Mortimer and a young man by the name of Roger Clayburn were rival aspirants for the hand of the same young lady—a Miss Doretha St. Cloud, a remarkable beauty and the belle of the village. While nothing serious ever passed between the rival lovers, it was well understood that they were on anything but friendly terms, and it had been hinted that threats had escaped one or both of them on one or two occasions."

"One evening, while matters were at this status, young Clayburn was shot and killed while on his way from the house of the young lady. It was proven at the trial that Mortimer was seen to pass the spot where Clayburn's body was found—a little grove—during the evening; but as the prosecution could not establish the exact time at which he passed, and as the doctor proved his own whereabouts during the whole evening with the exception of about half an hour, the jury disagreed and he was acquitted. But, as I say, the public are not satisfied of his innocence and the young man has either to establish it beyond all possibility of doubt or leave the place at a terrible sacrifice. Therefore he has appealed to me to help him out of his difficulty, and I, in turn, have submitted it to you with a view of having you look into it."

Thad was silent and thoughtful for a moment or two, and then asked one more question:

"Has anybody been working on the case, inspector?"

"Not lately. Soon after the close of the trial the friends of the murdered man employed a private detective for a short time; but you know what the investigations of those chaps usually amount to."

"Yes," replied the detective as he arose to go. "They usually succeed in rendering confusion worse confounded."

"Well, will you tackle it, Thad?" asked the inspector, also arising and stretching himself.

"Of course," drawled Thad. "Why not?"

"I knew in reason that you would, and I'll bet dollars to hayseed that you succeed in unraveling the mystery in the course of time."

"I'll do my best," said Thad, as he shook hands with the inspector preparatory to taking his leave.

An hour later the great detective was on his way to the quiet little village of Plainfield, New Jersey.

An hour's ride after leaving the depot at Jersey City brought him to his destination.

The detective's first move on arriving in the village was to call upon the young doctor, whom he found alone in his office, which consisted of a couple of rooms in a one-story wooden building.

Mortimer was a tall, spare man with a colorless complexion, dark hair and eyes and a nervous disposition.

Thad's first impression of him was not favorable. There appeared to the detective something hidden or covert about the young man; he had the appearance of one who dare not tell all his life and is in constant dread that the world will discover his secret.

He greeted the detective cordially as soon as he discovered who he was, however, and before Thad had conversed with him half an hour he had modified his opinion of the young doctor.

"To come at once to the point," began the detective, after the formalities of introduction were got through with, "what were your relations toward the murdered man?"

"We had no relations," replied the young doctor, "beyond a casual acquaintance which, as we both soon became aware that we were rivals, never ripened into anything approaching friendship."

"Did you ever have any words?"

"Not exactly. Once when Miss St. Cloud accompanied me to an entertainment on the same evening when he had an engagement with her, he wrote me a rather curt note expressing in not very polite terms, his general opinion of me, for taking advantage, as he put it, of him, to which I replied in another note in similarly choice language, hinting that if he did not relish my conduct he had his remedy. This he took for a challenge, but instead of replying to it or accepting it he went about among his friends, some of whom were my friends, making threats of various kinds, from having me arrested to doing me up."

"Did you ever meet after that?"

"Only once—at a ball."

"Was the matter referred to?"

"Not at all. We did not speak. It was a mutual cut."

"This matter was doubtless pretty well gone over in the trial," broke off the detective suddenly, "so I will go no further into it. Have you any reason, doctor, for suspecting any one of the crime?"

The young man dropped his eyes to the floor and colored a trifle.

"There is a person whom I strongly suspect," he finally faltered; "but I would rather shield—that person until every resource has been exhausted in attempting to discover some one else. For while, as I say, I suspect—this party, I would rather a thousand times believe it was some one else, if it were possible, and hope and pray that my suspicions my prove false."

"Who is the party to whom you refer?" demanded Thad rather peremptorily.

Again the young man hesitated.

"Must—must I tell?" he finally stammered.

"If you desire me to work on the case—yes," replied the detective.

"Well," faltered the young man after another pause, "I presume you must know, then, but as I said, I would much rather have kept her name out of the affair for the present."

"Her?" cried Thad in astonishment. "It is a woman then, is it?"

"Yes—Miss St. Cloud," murmured Mortimer in an almost inaudible voice.

Now the detective was astonished.

He stared at the young man for several minutes before he could recover sufficiently to speak.

"What reason have you for suspecting her?" he finally asked.

"I have two reasons for believing it," replied the doctor in a firmer voice than he had hitherto used. "First of all, she had the best motive a woman could have for committing the crime, and second, a letter of hers which has recently come into my hands comes very near being a confession of the crime."

Thad opened his eyes a little wider than ever.

This looked as though the so-called mysterious case was rather a simple one after all.

"What was the motive?" was the first question after recovering a little from his surprise.

The young man colored violently and was silent for some moments.

At length he said in so low a tone that the detective could scarcely hear him:

"Clayburn ruined her!"

Thad grew more astonished every instant. Why, he thought, had none of these facts come out during the present investigations?

He was reflective a moment or two, and then resumed:

"Are you sure of this last statement of yours?"

"I have her word for it," replied the young man, coolly.

"Um! Have you the letter?"

"I have."

"Will you let me see it?"

"Yes, upon one condition."

"And that is?"

"That you will not proceed against her, nor allow her to know that you are in possession of these facts until you have exhausted every resource at your command to trace the crime to some one else."

"Let me see," mused the detective, after a short pause, "you are defraying the expense of this investigation, are you not, doctor?"

"I am," rejoined the young man, coldly.

"In that case I do not see how I can refuse to grant your request. Although it has always been my rule to bag the game as soon as fairly treed. There will be no harm in calling upon the young lady herself, of course?"

"No. At least I have no right to expect that you will refrain from that. But I would like to ask you to avoid throwing out any hint which will either induce her to believe that I have divulged what she must understand that I know, or that will lead her to suspect that you have a clue to her guilt."

"I promise to be careful in both these matters," said Thad, in a kindly tone.

Without another word the young man rose, left the room and went into the adjoining apartment, whence, a few moments later, he returned, holding a small, white envelope between his thumb and finger.

Approaching the table near which the detective sat, he laid the envelope down in front of him, without a word.

Thad drew the letter out, and read as follows:

"PLAINFIELD, Sept. 10th, 18—.

"DEAR MARTIN:—

"Inasmuch as the trial appears to be going against Eldridge, I feel called upon to make a confession that I had not intended to make except in an extreme emergency. That emergency seems to have arrived. He must be saved at all hazards! He did not commit the murder! It was I who did it! Perhaps you will doubt my word. Perhaps you will wonder what motive I could have had, and imagine that I had none—that I am doing this to save the man I love above all others. But this is not so. I do love Eldridge better than any man that ever lived, but this confession would not be made if I had not committed the crime."

"You still doubt me and ask me for my motive. I will tell you. I once loved Roger Clayburn, and taking advantage of that love, he did me the foulest injury it is possible for a man to do a woman, and then refused to save my good name by allowing me to take his. Then I hated him! Oh, how ardently I hated him! And thirsted for his blood! Yes, and I had my revenge. It was sweet, and I hugged the precious recollection of my deed to my heart, until Eldridge's life became in danger, and then I decided upon the step I have just taken. Lay this confession before those in authority, dear Martin. Meanwhile I shall await the coming of the constable, to arrest me, with a delight only possible to experience on seeing Eldridge set at liberty. I leave all to you, only see that he is released. Good-by."

Your friend,

"DORETHA ST. CLOUD."

## CHAPTER II.

### A PLEASANT INTERVIEW.

WHEN Thad looked up after completing the perusal of the letter he was a little startled to find the doctor's eyes fixed upon him, and he had not noticed up to that moment what eyes they were!

Now that the detective had an opportunity of examining them, however, though ever so briefly, he was more than ever impressed with the idea he had first had of the man—that there was something concealed about him.

This impression, it will be remembered, was partly dissipated after the first few minutes' conversation with the young man; but now it had returned stronger than ever.

The moment he encountered the detective's eyes the young doctor dropped his to the floor.

Thad was silent for some moments and devoted himself to quietly studying the young man's face.

At length he resumed:

"You believe in the sincerity of this letter, do you, doctor?"

The doctor raised his eyes spasmodically and flushed a little, at the same time the detective could not fail to notice that he was confused and nervous.

"Certainly," he finally responded in a subdued voice. "Why not, sir?"

"Because in my opinion it bears the impress of sham so unmistakably that I am surprised that any sane man should be deceived by it."

"What do you mean?"

"That the girl is no more guilty than I am."

"Do you really think so?" and the fellow's face wore an expression which the detective could not determine for the life of him whether it was gratification or disappointment. Perhaps it was a comingling of the two.

"I am positive of it," rejoined Thad firmly.

"No guilty woman would speak like that. There is a touch of desperation in it, it is true, but it is the desperation of devotion and not of remorse. Mark my word, she never committed the murder, and what is more, I doubt the other statement about his having deceived her."

"Do you really?" and there was genuine gratification now.

"I do indeed. But tell me, why was not this letter brought in evidence at the trial?"

"Because I managed to keep it out. I would rather have died for the crime, innocent though I was, than see her suffer."

"Very noble in you," remarked Thad with the least touch of sarcasm in his voice. "It was no more than the manly part that you should have played after her devotion, but how comes it that you have allowed that letter to exist as a menace to her all this time? I should think you would have destroyed it the instant it came into your possession. And how is it you



voluntarily put it in evidence now as well as express your own suspicions of her guilt, unsolicited? Do you think she would betray you thus?"

Thad spoke rather severely, for he had suddenly conceived a most utter contempt for the fellow, on account of what he considered his want of manliness.

The young man hung his head and was silent for some time.

At length he spoke, still keeping his eyes upon the floor.

"Allow me to explain, sir, before you begin to censure me for my conduct," he began. "The facts are these: While the trial was in progress Miss St. Cloud sent this letter to a friend of hers named Martin Hopkins. She was evidently somewhat devoted to me then. Hopkins showed me the letter while I was in jail and asked me what he should do with it. I told him to destroy it by all means. He said 'No, it might be useful in an emergency,' and that he would keep it. I thought little more about it. My trial continued and ended with my acquittal. Overwhelmed with gratitude at her magnanimity, my first action was to fly to the woman who had offered to sacrifice herself for me. What was my surprise and disappointment to find her cold and full of scorn, and her first words were an accusation of having murdered the only man she ever loved!"

"Did you remind her of the letter?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"She denied all knowledge of it."

"Just as I thought," declared the detective. "She never wrote a syllable of it. The whole thing has been concocted by some clever and unscrupulous enemy to blast her reputation and to save yours."

Although Thad did not express it, he firmly believed he knew where the scheme had originated.

"I think you are mistaken, sir," protested Mortimer. "I am thoroughly acquainted with her handwriting and I know it is hers. Besides several of our mutual friends have examined it and all pronounced it genuine."

"It is quite evident that whoever forged the letter, if it was forged, was thoroughly acquainted with the young lady's chirography," said the detective, ironically.

The fellow winced under the implication but affected not to notice its import.

"Not only did she accuse me to my face," continued the doctor, with a desperate effort at coolness, "but she has been the most industrious of all my enemies in condemning the action of the jury and reviving the belief in my guilt among the village people."

"All of which goes to show," interposed the detective, rising "that she believes firmly in your guilt, that she loved Clayburn more than she ever did you, and that she never wrote that letter, which would have belied her conduct before and since the murder. I will bid you good-afternoon, doctor. I shall call upon some other parties, and trust I shall see you to-morrow."

On quitting the doctor's office the detective made his way at once to the home of Miss St. Cloud, which was in the suburbs of the village.

Thad found a most delightful old mansion embowered in a clump of fine old trees.

Approaching the house along a shady gravel walk, his knock was promptly answered and he sent up his card with a request to see Miss St. Cloud.

A moment later the servant returned with the information that the lady would receive him.

Thad followed the attendant into the drawing-room, and was impressed more than ever with the luxurious grandeur of the place. Every article of furniture was of the most exquisite pattern and expensive quality.

In the drawing-room he found the young lady, who arose from her seat to meet the detective and received him with a gracious smile.

Thad was at once struck with her beauty and grace.

"Be seated," she said, in a soft musical voice, at the same time sinking into an easy-chair.

"You are the detective, I believe," she went on, turning her large beautiful blue eyes fully upon him.

"Yes, miss," responded Thad, although he wondered how she knew, for there was nothing about his card to indicate such a thing.

"You come from Doctor Mortimer, of course?"

This was another surprise for the detective.

And he began to think if news traveled at that rate in this village he would have to exercise a good deal of caution or everybody would know all about his movements before he did himself.

"Yes, miss," he finally replied. "But I am at a loss to understand how you knew."

"Oh, that is simple enough," she rejoined, laughing. "I was aware that the doctor intended employing a detective, and a friend of mine saw you enter his office awhile ago and brought me the intelligence. You know that strangers are not so common in the village not to attract attention when they do arrive."

"Well, my opinion is that if the doctor is desirous of having the detective discover anything

he had better keep his movements as much of a secret as possible."

"If he desired the detective to really discover anything he probably would," responded the young lady with a little ripple of laughter.

"Then you do not think he desires the truth to be found, eh, Miss St. Cloud?"

"Certainly not. He knows that everybody believes him guilty, and he cannot stay here as long as this opinion prevails, so he makes a show of having the matter looked up by a detective, hoping and praying at the same time that the detective will never discover the truth. And, now that you are here, I hope and pray that you will find the truth."

"That is what I shall endeavor to do. But suppose it should be located in the wrong place—I mean, suppose it should fall upon some one whom you regard very highly and exonerate the doctor?"

"I should be disappointed, of course. At the same time I should be glad to have the truth known."

"You believe, I presume, that the doctor is the guilty party, notwithstanding the fact that he was acquitted?"

"Yes. There is not the shadow of a doubt that he is the murderer of Roger Clayburn."

"Was there ever anything approaching mutual affection between you and the doctor?"

"No. He was a regular visitor at our house and I frequently accompanied him to places of amusement and to church. I liked him very well and enjoyed his society. He is agreeable company."

"On the other hand, you were betrothed to Mr. Clayburn, were you not?"

"I was not."

"Pardon me," said Thad apologetically. "I see that you are in mourning, and I naturally concluded that it was worn for Mr. Clayburn."

"No, sir," she replied, "this is worn for my father."

"I ask your pardon. But your relations with Mr. Clayburn were of the most friendly, not to say intimate nature, were they not?"

"No more than with Mr. Mortimer. I considered them good friends and treated them as such, but showed no partiality."

"Did you not accompany the doctor on one occasion after having made an appointment for the same evening with Mr. Clayburn?"

"I did, but it was after waiting a full hour after the time at which Mr. Clayburn was to come."

"Were there not some hard feelings and some threats made in consequence of the affair?"

"I never heard of any?"

"Did neither of them ever speak to you about it?"

"Mr. Clayburn censured me good-naturedly for breaking my engagement, but I soon persuaded him that it was all his fault."

"And Mortimer never spoke of it, did he?"

"Not to my recollection."

"But you will admit that there was a rivalry between the two men?"

"If there was I am not aware of it."

"Then what makes you think that the doctor killed Clayburn? He must have had a motive."

"I'll tell you, sir. I had known for a long time that there was bad blood between the two gentlemen, especially on the part of the doctor. I knew that he hated Mr. Clayburn vehemently, although I never understood the cause. One night both gentlemen were here and we had played cards till a late hour—my cousin, a young lady who was visiting me at the time, making up the table. Mr. Clayburn was compelled to meet some appointment and had to leave first. A short time afterward Minnie and I accompanied the doctor to the gate. I noticed that he was non-communicative and morose, a thing very rare with him, and I rallied him about it. He made little or no response for awhile, but finally turning to me as we stood at the gate so that my cousin could not see his action, and taking out a small pistol, held it so that the moon shone upon it. I asked him what it meant, to which he replied that there might be one less person in the community before many weeks passed over."

"Had you any assurance that he referred to Mr. Clayburn?"

"Certainly not, although I suspected it; but I took the liberty of asking whom he meant, adding jestingly that I hoped it wasn't me. I shall never forget his reply. 'It has not been so long since you saw the man I mean that you should have forgotten how he looks!' he whispered."

"Poor Clayburn!" I exclaimed in an undertone, scarcely knowing what I said. "What has he done to you?"

"The doctor put his lips so close to my ear that I felt his hot breath on my cheek. 'Let his God answer for that!' he muttered. I was so shocked that I should probably have fainted had not Minnie come to my rescue by demanding in a jocular manner what secrets we had from her. That had the effect of removing the dreadful vision from my mind which his words had left."

"How long was this before the murder?"

"About a week."

"Did you tell this in court?"

"Yes, sir, but he proved an *alibi* and my testimony went for nothing."

### CHAPTER III.

#### AN UNEXPECTED CLUE.

AFTER this revelation it was difficult for the detective to see how Mortimer could be anything but guilty.

Still he was not convinced.

He was not the man to jump at conclusions.

Experience had taught him that circumstantial evidence, in nine cases out of ten, was worthless.

In spite of appearances, two points stood out in Thad's mind and gave the lie to what otherwise appeared to be facts.

These were, first the *alibi*. If the doctor had been guilty, how had he succeeded in proving that he was somewhere else at the moment of the murder? And second, why had he himself invited further investigation, when he must have known that if he was guilty a sharp detective was likely to unearth the facts and bring him to justice? And if the detective failed in this, so long as he did not succeed in discovering the real criminal, the odium would still attach to himself.

These reflections flashed through the detective's mind rapidly while he sat in presence of the young lady whom Mortimer had accused of committing the crime, and although he had remained silent but a minute or so, the amount of thought that had passed through his mind gave him the idea of a much greater length of time.

"I ask your pardon, Miss St. Cloud," he hastened to exclaim. "I had fallen into such a reverie that I almost forgot your presence. The fact is, I was just debating with myself why, if this young man is guilty, he should have gone to the expense of a further investigation of the case."

The young lady gave vent to a ringing peal of laughter.

"Perhaps if you knew the gentleman as I do, it would seem less odd to you. In the first place, he knows that he cannot hope to live here and regain his practice as long as people believe him to be guilty of the murder of Roger Clayburn, and he knows they always will believe it unless something extraordinary happens to dispel the suspicion. He is vain or foolish enough to believe that his crime is too cleverly covered up for any detective on earth to unearth it, and he thinks that this voluntary investigation on his part at his own expense will lead people into the belief which you yourself just now expressed, that he would not have done so had he not been an innocent man."

"This seems feasible, if he is the trickster you hint at, Miss St. Cloud. But how about the *alibi*?"

"There is no faith, in my opinion, to be put in that. The fact is, he was attending a poor family, the father of which was dying. He had called half a dozen times during the day and night. They knew that the doctor would charge them nothing for his visits and give them money besides. Why shouldn't they swear that he was at their house at the very time at which Mr. Clayburn was supposed to have passed through the grove?"

"Um! Isay, Miss St. Cloud, it is fortunate for the young man that you were not the prosecuting attorney, and I'm afraid that if I hear much more of your argument I shall be inclined to abandon the case with the fixed impression that the very man I was employed to clear is guilty. Allow me to ask you one or two more questions, and I must go. First, did you make any effort or use any means to try to save Mortimer while he was being tried?"

"Certainly not. Did I not just tell you that I testified against him?"

"I understand. But after that, did you not relent and do or say something which was calculated to relieve the accused of suspicion?"

"I did not."

"Do you know a person by the name of Martin Hopkins?"

"I know that there is such a person, but I have never had anything to do with him."

"Never spoken to him?"

"No, sir."

"Nor communicated with him by letter?"

"Never."

"Have you met Mortimer since his release from prison?"

"Only once. He called at the house soon after his release, and I gave him to understand that under the circumstances his further visits would not be agreeable, and he went away. I haven't seen him since."

"Did he say nothing to you on that occasion about a letter which you were supposed to have written to this Martin Hopkins?" asked the detective in a calm, quiet voice, at the same time watching the effect of his words on the girl's face.

The only result was an expression of surprise.

But it was not the surprise of one who has been caught in a falsehood. It appeared to Thad the surprise of innocence.

"Why, no," she exclaimed, opening her eyes very wide and looking the detective straight in the face. "Who could have given you such an impression?"

"I am not at liberty to say just at present,



but such an impression is current with certain people."

"The doctor, for instance?"

"Perhaps."

"I am not surprised. I have heard somewhere—I can not recall just where—that he had intimated that I knew more about the murder than I cared to tell."

"If it should ever come to the point where he should accuse you openly, what would you do?"

"Have him arrested, of course. But there is no danger of his ever doing anything of the kind."

The detective could not fail to notice that the girl, in spite of a desperate effort at coolness, was greatly agitated over this affair, and that this part of the catechism was decidedly distasteful to her, and as it did not appear that anything was to be gained by it, he decided to abandon it.

Still, there was a wide gap of discrepancy between the doctor's statement and hers, and Thad could not help but wonder who was responsible for it. He was also given to understand that he had a tough case before him.

"I have been thinking, Miss St. Cloud," he resumed after a short pause, "that possibly the young man was killed by some tramp or footpad for his money. Do you happen to know whether anything was missing from the body when found?"

"Nothing, I believe."

"Then he was not murdered for the sake of robbery."

"Certainly not."

Thad was a little surprised at the positive manner in which she pronounced this decision.

Having gleaned all the information he deemed it possible to get from the young lady, the detective arose to depart, when she suddenly exclaimed:

"Oh, by the way, there was something missing from the body, too, now that I remember. But I don't suppose that will be of any benefit to you."

"What was it?"

"Only a little medal."

"A medal? What kind of a medal?"

"A gold medal which he received for the best class-poem while at college."

"Is it at all certain that it was taken on this occasion?"

"I am certain of it," she replied in the same positive tone.

"How do you know?" asked the detective eagerly.

"Because he showed it to me and told me its history almost the last thing before leaving me, and he could not have lost it, as it was hung about his neck by a strong cord, and it could not have been more than twenty minutes after he left my company when he was shot down by the assassin."

"Did these facts come out in the late trial?"

"Yes, sir."

"And was there no importance attached to them?"

"Yes. They were used to show that Doctor Mortimer could not have been the murderer because he would never have stopped under the circumstances to take the medal from his victim."

"What was the theory?"

"That some one who had attended the same college with him and was possibly a rival for the medal, took it."

"And your theory, Miss St. Cloud?"

"That the doctor took it himself."

"Why?"

"Because on my last birthday but one both young gentlemen wrote poems on the occasion. Afterward, when the doctor was alone with me and we were comparing the two compositions, he asked me bluntly which I considered best, and I told him frankly that I considered Mr. Clayburn's decidedly the best. And then seeing that I had wounded his vanity I hastened to qualify my remarks by saying that Mr. Clayburn would be expected to be the better writer, inasmuch as he wore the medal of a prize poet. This I said in a jesting manner, but it angered him more than ever, and he remarked: 'Yes, he wears the medal of a prize-poet, but he may not always wear it.'"

"Was this too submitted at the trial?"

"Yes, sir."

"And no significance attached to it?"

"None, because the medal was not found in the doctor's possession. The idea! I think I could do better as a detective myself than half these fellows who pretend to follow the business."

"I have no doubt of it, Miss St. Cloud," rejoined Thad, laughing. "But I will leave you now. I am under obligations to you for your information," said the detective, rising and extending his hand.

"Don't mention it, sir," she replied in her soft, musical voice, giving him her hand. "If I can be of any further service to you, don't hesitate about calling upon me, especially if it will be the means of convicting that rascal!"

Her great eyes flashed ominously as she uttered the last sentence.

Thad's next proposed destination was the home of the parents of the murdered man.

This lay at the opposite end of the village some half a mile distant and to reach it by the most direct route he was compelled to pass through the identical grove in which young Clayburn had been murdered.

This caused the detective no uneasiness. On the contrary, it would afford him an opportunity to study the location and perhaps he might discover some clue as he went along.

It was growing dark when he entered the edge of the wood, but the night was clear, the stars shining, and a soft autumnal breeze fanned his cheek as he walked along.

So delightful did everything appear that Thad could not resist the temptation of sitting down upon a fallen tree to listen to the soft ripple of the leaves overhead and enjoy the perfume that was being wafted to him on the breeze.

From the description he had had, he could not be many feet from where young Clayburn fell.

As he sat there the detective fell into a deep reverie.

He went over in his mind the details of the two stories he had heard concerning the murder.

It was strange that he should have run upon two people at the outset each of whom accused the other of the crime, and each have the appearance of innocence.

And he thought of the letter.

Who had written it?

Was it possible that Mortimer was such an incarnate fiend as to commit such a crime and then forge a letter in order to fix it upon a helpless, innocent girl? Or could it be that she had really written the letter, and after relenting, simply denied all knowledge of it? The whole thing was shrouded in deep mystery, but perhaps an interview with the man Martin Hopkins would throw some light upon it. If this man should testify to having received the letter—provided he was a man of integrity—then the doctor's story was in so far true and might prove wholly true.

This would go a long way toward acquitting him of the suspicion hanging over him.

On the contrary, if Hopkins should deny any knowledge of the letter, the case would be plain. There could no longer be any doubt of Mortimer's guilt, and he had forged the letter to cover his crime.

But just at this point in Thad's reverie, he became aware of some one approaching on foot.

He listened. Sure enough, there could be no doubt of it. There came the sound of slow, measured footsteps.

The detective waited breathlessly.

Why he should have attached any significance to the fact, as it was still early and the villagers were apt to be abroad, is hard to tell, but he did. A few moments later the person came in sight. The detective could discern his outlines against the sky and see that he had a somewhat bent and slouching figure.

When he had arrived within a few feet of the detective, the pedestrian stopped, glanced cautiously about and then took something from his pocket and held it up so that the moon shone upon it. It glistened and had the appearance of a medal!

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A DEEP MYSTERY.

THE detective's prophecy that the owner of the footsteps was in some way connected with the case upon which he was at work seemed to have been fulfilled when he saw the medal gleam in the moonlight.

It did not appear possible that there could be any other solution of the mystery.

Why should this person, supposing he had no connection with the crime, come to the very spot where it was committed and exhibit the medal?

And Thad remembered the old superstition about murderers being unable to keep away from the scene of their crime.

His first impulse was to rush out and arrest the fellow at once, with the hope that through him he might discover the real murderer or instigator—if such there were.

But on maturer reflection he decided to watch, and, if necessary, shadow him and note his movements.

Meantime the mysterious personage was conducting himself in a most extraordinary manner.

Holding the shining object—medal or whatever it was—aloft, so that the moon caught up its reflection and shot its rays back into his face, the fellow grinned and grimaced, and chattered incoherently, still keeping his eyes fixed on the object in his hand.

Then suddenly a change appeared to come over him.

His grin all of a sudden changed to a dark scowl, and putting the medal away in his bosom, he drew what appeared to be a pistol from his pocket and began to flourish it about in a wild manner.

Only at intervals could the detective catch a glimpse of the fellow's face, as it was for the

most part concealed in gloom, but occasionally it would come out into the moonlight, so that he could see what it was like, and he was almost startled, used as he was to horrible sights, to behold this one, so like the face of a fiend was it.

The man appeared to be somewhere about sixty or sixty-five years old, his face was seamed and furrowed with care or crime, his eyes small and snake-like, and his ragged hair and beard, which were as white as snow, swept almost to his waist. His clothes were old-fashioned, and patched in places, but not literally ragged.

How long he would have kept up his wild gesticulations is hard to surmise, had he not been interrupted after a few moments by the sound of approaching horse's hoofs.

The moment the sound came to his ear, which was at the same instant it came to Thad's, the fellow sprang to one side out of the path, into a thicket of undergrowth.

In his anxiety not to lose sight of the fellow, the detective sprang up from his seat on the log, and therefore emerged from his concealment in the shadow.

He had no more than reached the path when the horseman came up, and was compelled to rein in his horse to avoid running onto Thad.

The rider was badly frightened and evidently mistook the detective for a footpad, for he cried in a tremulous voice:

"Who—who are you?"

Thad could have murdered him for exposing his presence, but instead of stopping to answer the question he sprang into the thicket after the mysterious fugitive.

Whereupon, without more ado the horseman drew up and fired after him with a revolver, the ball whizzing uncomfortably close to his face.

The detective had no thought of getting into an altercation there, however, and decided to get out of danger as well as he could and at the same time keep his man in view or as near to him as possible.

He therefore crouched down to the earth, and had the satisfaction of hearing the fellow riding away at the top of his speed, a second later.

Thad knew by this that either the horseman was badly frightened or else that he was on his way to alarm the town, which would be on him in a twinkling.

He glanced about, but of course could see nothing in the darkness.

However, after listening a moment, he caught the sound of footsteps receding at a rapid pace in an opposite direction from that taken by the horseman.

Believing it to be his man, the detective lost no time in emerging from the thicket and regaining the path. Once there he paused to listen and was rewarded by hearing the footsteps pattering away in the distance apparently along the path.

As soon as he was satisfied of this fact, he started on the run in that direction.

A few minutes sufficed at the pace he was going to bring him out of the grove, and he again paused to look over the ground.

He could no longer hear the footsteps, but after gazing about for some moments he espied a figure moving across a field in the distance.

Again he bounded away like the wind, and a few moments' run brought him within a short distance of the figure, and he was gratified to see that it was the same person whom he had seen in the grove.

The person appeared not to have noticed his approach until then, but as soon as he did he broke off and ran like a deer. So fast was his pace, indeed, that the detective, who was also a fleet runner, was unable to keep up with him. Thad was surprised at this, for not only was the man advanced in years, but he appeared to be bent and crippled.

Thad strained every muscle, but to no purpose. The fugitive easily outdistanced him.

However, the detective managed, with superhuman efforts, to keep him in sight for a long time.

They were now in an open field which seemed to stretch away interminably. The fugitive had gained so much on the detective that he was fully a hundred yards in advance, and Thad was on the point of abandoning the race, when the fellow suddenly disappeared into a small hut or shanty.

Thad lost no time in arriving at the shanty, which stood alone out in the open field. It was built of logs, and did not appear to be high enough for a man to stand erect in it.

The detective pushed on up, and when he had arrived in front of the rude door, knocked.

Receiving no response, he knocked again.

Still the door was not opened, nor did he hear any one moving inside, so without more ado he raised his foot and delivered a vigorous kick upon the door. The frail structure rattled and shook violently, and a second kick sent it to the floor inside.

All was darkness within.

Thad stopped to listen, but not a sound met his ear.

What could it mean?

Was the fellow waiting for him to get inside



so that he would be in his power and then pounce upon or shoot him?

These were but transitory reflections, however, and the next moment he cast them from him and stepped inside the cabin.

Again he paused to listen, but as before no sound could be heard, although once he thought he could hear some one breathing.

Some men in the detective's place would have grown nervous or frightened, but he merely lost his patience.

Without hesitating any longer or stopping to consider the possible consequences, he drew out a match and struck it. As soon as the light blazed up he held it above his head and looked about the room into which he had come.

The shanty consisted of but one room, the floor of which was the naked earth.

There was no furniture beyond a goods-box which had evidently been used as a dining-table and a smaller one which had probably been used as a seat. There was a bunch of dirty straw in one corner and a tattered quilt thrown partly over it.

Beyond this there was nothing—at least in sight, although the place had evidently been recently occupied as there was still a fire smoldering on the hearth.

But what had become of the inmate whom Thad has just seen enter?

The detective looked for another door or window on the opposite side of the house where he might have effected his escape, but there was neither.

Lighting a second match he looked about and finally discovered a bit of candle. Lighting this, he proceeded to reconnoiter.

He examined the walls and sounded the dirt floor, but was rewarded with no discovery worth mentioning.

He found a box submerged beneath the ground and covered over, containing a few old clothes, and another with a few scraps of provisions in it, all of which showed that somebody lived there at some recent period, but where that person was at that moment was what puzzled the detective to know.

He sought in every conceivable place for a living being, but in vain. He even looked and poked up the chimney. There was no loft, so that no one could hide in that direction.

Finally after spending about half an hour of precious time in the place, the detective abandoned the search, having arrived at the conclusion that he had been mistaken about the fugitive coming into the hut at all.

He went outside and looked about, but no one was in sight.

Even if the fellow was abroad, Thad thought, he had spent so much time in the shanty that the fellow could be a mile away by this time.

The detective also realized that he was a long way from the village, that he was very hungry and that he had not yet made arrangements to stop anywhere.

Much, therefore, as he regretted giving up the search, he found it would be necessary, for the night at least.

Thad started to retrace his steps toward the village.

Referring to his watch, he saw that it was after nine o'clock, too late to visit anybody in the village, so that he was forced to abandon his visit to the Clayburns that night.

His course lay along, although not necessarily through, the grove, and as he came by he looked in vain for the horseman and the posse he was expected to have. There was no one to be seen, and Thad could not resist the temptation of again walking through the grove, as he could reach the main part of the village that way as well as any other.

All was quiet now and not an object could be seen moving.

Arriving at the spot where he had seen the strange creature with the medal, he sat down again on the fallen tree in such a position that he was completely in shadow.

Thus he sat for some time plunged in thought. His meditations were not very deep, however, for he soon realized that he was ravenously hungry.

Still, in spite of this and fatigue, there was an undefinable charm that seemed to root him to the spot.

He did not resist the temptation to remain, believing, for some reason, that the solution of the great mystery upon which he was working was to be found here in this beautiful grove.

And just then he was startled by approaching footsteps. Unlike the ones he had heard before, these were so soft and noiseless that he did not hear them until the person making them was within a few feet of the detective.

Peering out of his dark hiding-place Thad watched till the approaching person passed into a patch of moonlight, when, to his surprise, he saw that it was a woman!

Scarcely had he made the discovery when she arrived at the very spot where he had seen the man go through the strange maneuvers, and stopping, looked cautiously about her.

Thad expected to see her going through some sort of wild gyrations but she did not.

After apparently satisfying herself that nobody was about, the woman deliberately walked

over to the very log upon which Thad was sitting, and not more than ten feet away from him, and sat down.

Fortunately the shadow in which he sat was so dense that she could not see him, even if she had looked in his direction, which she did not.

Thad kept remarkably quiet, scarcely breathing, lest she should discover him.

The woman herself sat perfectly motionless for a long time, but after awhile she appeared to grow nervous and restless and began to shuffle about.

At length she began to hum a tune in a low tone.

Then it was that the detective tried to discover by her voice who she was, or if she was anybody he had ever known.

There was something familiar in her voice, and he tried to associate it with that of Miss St. Cloud, but was soon compelled to confess that it was not the same.

Minute after minute and hour after hour went by, and still the woman sat there, restless, uneasy, frequently shifting about, humming snatches of song and ever looking along the shadowy path as though expecting some one.

Finally her patience appeared to be rewarded, for the sound of footsteps could be heard in the distance, and a little while afterward a man strode up, whom, as soon as he came into the moonlight, Thad had no difficulty in recognizing.

It was the old man with the medal!

## CHAPTER V.

### THE CONSPIRATORS.

As soon as the old man arrived opposite the woman she hopped off the log, ran out into the path and grasped his hand in a familiar manner.

"Come sit down on this log," she implored in an insinuating voice. "I want to talk to you."

"I don't mind if I do," rejoined the old man, suiting the action to the word and following her to the seat. "I've had a deuce of a run, and am pretty well done up."

"A run?" she exclaimed in surprise. "What were you running for, Reuben?"

"Why, there was a fellow after me—chased me from here to the Hermitage—but—ha! ha! ha!—he didn't find me when he got there. Old Reuben Slouthers is a little too sharp for them. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Who was it that chased you?" asked the woman curiously.

"I'll be switched if I'll ever tell you. All I know is, he's a pretty good sprinter, but not up to old Reuben yet. Ha! ha! ha!"

"What kind of a looking man was he, Reube?"

"Oh, as far as I saw of him, which wasn't much, he seemed to be a pretty good-looking chap, strong and athletic looking."

"Dressed in dark clothes?"

"Black, I think."

"Smooth-shaven?"

"Yes."

"Just as I suspected! Do you know who that was, Reube?"

"If his mother didn't know him any better than I do he'd 'a' been an orphan before he was born, Dory."

"Why, that was a detective!"

"The Old Nick you say!"

"That is exactly what he is."

"Well, I'll be switched!"

Thad could not see the old man's face, but he could imagine its expression of astonishment and horror from the tone of his words.

Another thing that gave the detective a start was the name Dory, as pronounced by the old man.

And now that the woman began to speak, he was sure that he had heard the voice before.

Could it be possible that it was Miss St. Cloud?

And was the name Dory a diminutive of Doretha, the young lady's Christian name?

If this was true, then there could be no doubt about what Mortimer had said of her being true.

She had written the self-accusing letter!

"Yes," pursued the woman after a pause. "I saw him this afternoon. He was employed by Mortimer to come out here and investigate the case. Do you suppose he will succeed, Reuben?"

"It will be a bad day for Mortimer if he does!" cried the old man, and followed the remark with a burst of laughter.

"It will indeed," laughed the woman. "But let him go on. He'll never find a bur in our fleece, eh, Reuben?"

"I should say not."

"At the same time we cannot be too cautious in what we say or do while the bloodhound is around."

"True enough."

"You had better see Martin Hopkins to-night if you can and put him on his guard about revealing certain things."

"Yes, I'll do that, Dory."

"Another thing I'd like to have you do as soon as possible."

"What's that, Dory?" asked the old man, submissively.

"See Mortimer yourself or have Hopkins do it, and get possession of that letter."

The old man was silent.

Thad could imagine he could see the old chap shaking his head dubiously.

"I'll try," he finally faltered. "But I'm afraid it's going to be a tough job. And then just as likely as not he has already seen the detective and given him the letter."

"No danger of that. Mortimer would not dare to do such a thing. He knows better. But I must go now, so as to get back before they miss me. You had better go at once to Hopkins."

"At once," echoed the old man.

"Good-night, Reuben."

"Good-night, Dory."

They parted, one going one way and the other the opposite.

Thad was in a quandary which to follow.

He was anxious to see where the woman went in order to establish beyond all cavil whether she really was Miss St. Cloud or not, and he was desirous of being on hand if possible when the old man met Hopkins, or better still, if the thing had been possible, he would have liked to see him before the old man did and get the facts about the letter.

But that seemed out of the question now, as the old man had already started, and Thad knew how he could travel.

So he decided to follow the woman.

By the time he had arrived at this conclusion both parties had got far enough away for it to be safe to shadow them.

The detective therefore glided out of his place of concealment and put after the woman.

He kept at a safe distance behind her until they were out of the grove, and after that, by taking the opposite side of the street and keeping in the shadow of the houses he had no trouble in shadowing her without the least chance of being observed himself.

But after they had gone the distance of two or three blocks Thad was surprised to see that she was not going in the direction of the St. Cloud residence, and after she had gone a little further he was still more surprised to see her taking a nearly opposite direction to the one leading to St. Cloud's.

This puzzled him so much that he was determined to see the woman's face before she should slip away from him.

He therefore stopped in the shadow of a building long enough to change the appearance of his face by adding a pair of decidedly English whiskers and sticking a monocle in his eye.

He then hastened around the block in an opposite direction so as to head the woman off as she came around.

Having succeeded in turning the corner thus before she reached it, the detective took up his position in the shadow of a building and awaited her coming.

He had not long to wait, but unfortunately when she did arrive she had her face covered by a thick veil.

The detective was at a loss what to do for an instant, but he was determined to carry his point at all hazards.

In an instant he had decided what to do.

Making a spring at the woman he snatched the veil from her face.

Now he was astonished.

It was Miss St. Cloud!

The action was so sudden that she did not have presence of mind enough to scream, as would have been natural, and before she recovered from her stupefaction he had returned the veil in the most courteous manner possible with an abject apology based upon the fact that he had mistaken her for some one else.

The obsequiousness of what appeared to her a very handsome young Englishman quickly dispelled her anger and the next instant the woman smiled and granted the pardon asked.

"Pon me soul, doncher know, I thought it was Miss St. Cloud!" he minced in excellent Johnnie Bull dialect.

The woman laughed.

"I am not surprised at that," she replied. "I have frequently been mistaken for her."

Here was a surprise for the detective.

Could his eyes so far deceive him that this was not the identical woman whom he had talked to in the afternoon?

It did not seem possible.

As he scanned her features now in the not overly brilliant light of the street-lamp he could not discern a single shade of difference in any of its lineaments.

Even the voice was the same.

Of course he did not doubt for an instant that it was Miss St. Cloud, but he wondered that she should have tried to conceal her identity. Certainly she would not have done so had she been an innocent woman, he thought.

And he was determined to entrap her if possible.

"Are you acquainted with Miss St. Cloud?" he asked politely.

"I am not," she replied coldly, and at the same time signified her desire to end the interview and get away.

"She is a very dear friend of mine," he per-



sisted, following her up as she started to go on. "I should like to have you know her."

"And I have no desire to know her," she snapped, increasing her gait. "Good-night."

With that she switched away so quickly that he could not keep up the conversation without actual rudeness, so he contented himself with dropping behind until she got a little in advance and then proceeded to shadow her again.

The woman kept right on her way without appearing to apprehend that she was being followed, but from the manner in which she wound about, turned corners and retraced her steps over and over again Thad was constrained to think she was trying to cover her tracks from some one, which could be no other than himself.

At one time the detective was sure she was making for the St. Cloud residence, but when she arrived within a block of the place she again turned and went in another direction.

This time she kept straight on, apparently under the impression that she had thrown her shadow off the scent, for nearly half a mile, clear out into the suburbs of the village, in fact, and finally stopped at a house and went in.

For some reason Thad did not believe she intended to remain in this house, and waited for a long time for her to come out again. But after standing about for more than half an hour he decided that she intended to remain there all night, as it was now nearly midnight, and made his way once more back to the village.

Late as it was, however, he determined upon one thing, and that was to satisfy his curiosity as to whether the woman he had been shadowing was really Miss St. Cloud or not, and to that end stopped at the house, which was directly in his way.

Fortunately when he approached the house he saw a light still burning somewhere up-stairs which showed that some one was still up.

His knock being answered, Thad gave his card to the attendant and told him to give it to the young lady, and also say that he had news for her.

The servant went away and in another moment returned with the information that the young lady would see him. And scarcely were the words delivered before she appeared in person.

Thad had remained standing in the hall and she met him there, and without inviting him into the sitting-room, proceeded to converse with him.

"Do you know that I expected you back to-night," she began in a cheerful tone; "and for that reason I did not retire."

"It was your light I saw in the window up-stairs, then," remarked the detective.

"Undoubtedly, as mine was probably the only light in the house at the time. What news?"

Thad related as much of his adventures as he cared to reveal to an outsider, and ended by asking:

"Have you ever been mistaken for any one else about here, Miss St. Cloud?"

"Why, no," she exclaimed opening her eyes very wide. "Why do you ask?"

"Nothing, only I saw a lady this evening who bore a striking resemblance to you."

"Indeed? I wonder who she could be."

This with the most arch and innocent expression of countenance imaginable.

Thad was not satisfied, however.

It did seem a little extraordinary how she could have left the house to which he had followed her in the suburbs and beaten him back here. But when he came to think of it, he remembered that he had waited outside for half an hour which, if she had made her escape by some secret outlet, would have given her ample time to return.

And perhaps her remaining up to see him was only a blind, so that if he did come, as she half expected, he would see her there and therefore believe that the woman he had shadowed was some one else.

"I cannot tell who she is," rejoined the detective, eying her closely. "But if I did not know that you had been here all the time, and also that you would never be abroad in the grove at such an hour and in such company, I could swear the woman I saw and you were the same, especially when the veil was removed."

Miss St. Cloud grew scarlet and hastened away without another word.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ACCUMULATING EVIDENCE.

IN spite of his embarrassment in being left so unceremoniously alone, Thad was far from dissatisfied with the result of his visit to the St. Cloud mansion.

If he had gained nothing else he was now assured beyond the possibility of a doubt that Miss St. Cloud and the woman he had seen in communication with the old man in the grove were one and the same person. Consequently she must have written the incriminating letter, and consequently she must be guilty of the murder of Roger Clayburn. If the circumstances did not lead to this conclusion then his detective experience had been of no avail.

Still, for all that he was not satisfied that Mortimer was not guilty, or at least had a guilty knowledge of the affair.

It was now after midnight, and the detective had had nothing to eat since breakfast and had no place to sleep.

His next move after quitting the house, therefore, was to go to the leading hotel in the place and there make arrangements for lodging for the night and a bite of something cold to eat.

It was the average country tavern and he had to put up with what they had, which was not the best.

Among other inconveniences he was put into a room which opened into another which was occupied by a Jew peddler.

The peddler had the toothache and could not sleep and walked the floor all night. This, together with his agitation over the perplexed nature of the case upon which he was engaged, prevented the detective from sleeping also, and they finally got into conversation. They had not conversed long before the peddler insisted upon showing Thad his stock.

The detective glanced indifferently at his cheap jewelry, more for the sake of killing time than anything else, but finally the peddler showed him something that attracted his attention.

Thad picked it up and examined it, and was surprised to find that it was inscribed thus:

YALE COLLEGE.

PRESENTED TO

ROGER JAMES CLAYBURN,

FOR

BEST CLASS POEM,

1884.

The detective could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded excitedly.

"I bought that to-night," replied the grinning peddler. "Don't it vas nice?"

"Very pretty," responded the detective dryly. "Of whom did you buy it?"

The Jew hesitated about telling him for some time, but at length said that he had got the medal from a boy.

"What time to-night was it?" asked Thad, determined to corner the fellow if possible.

"Pout nine o'clock," replied the peddler.

"Where did the boy get it?"

"He fowened it in der grove."

"Just as I thought," mused the detective.

"The old man must have lost it while running away from me."

"What will you take for it, Isaac?"

"Dat medal vas vorth den dollars if it vas vorth a cendt!" cried the Jew, rolling his eyes up and raising his hands imploringly above his head.

"Oh, come, Isaac, I'll give you five."

"So help me Moshes, I melts dot medal down und makes a sleeve-button of it before I takes less as eight dollars!"

They finally struck a bargain, however, and Thad became the possessor of the medal.

He then retired and succeeded in catching an hour or two's sleep, but was up early, and after having breakfasted made his way toward the home of the Clayburns.

Like the St. Clouds, he found that the Clayburns lived in a fine, almost palatial old house, surrounded by magnificent wooded grounds.

He was shown into a sumptuously furnished drawing-room, where he was joined a few minutes later by a young man of perhaps twenty-eight, but who, from premature baldness and gray hair, might have been taken for twenty years older.

In answer to Thad's inquiry he stated that he was a brother of the murdered man, that his name was Robert Clayburn, that he was the only remaining heir, and that his father was an invalid.

"Had your brother any enemies, so far as you know?" was the detective's first question.

"None, except Doctor Mortimer," was the response.

"Then, of course, you are pretty well satisfied that he is the murderer, I presume."

"I have not the slightest doubt of it," exclaimed the young man, vehemently. "I only wish that a jury could be convinced as firmly as I am of the fact. That rascal would hang before many suns!"

"Do you remember of your brother having a medal, which he received at college for a prize poem, and which was missing from the body when found?"

"I do."

"You have no idea, of course, who took it?"

"Not unless Mortimer did."

"Why should he have taken it?"

"Because he was jealous of my brother for possessing it."

"Was that the only cause of enmity between them?"

"No, they were rivals for the hand of the same girl."

"But the young lady herself tells me that neither of them was betrothed to her, and that she did not look upon either as anything more than friends."

"With all due deference to her and her statement, allow me to say that she was engaged to both of them, and in my opinion she loved both of them, and could not decide which one to accept. If this was not the case, on Mortimer's side, at least, why did she use all her wiles, and a great deal of her money, to save him? Why, sir, the expense of his suit was paid by her. He hadn't a dollar."

"That is very strange," said Thad, half-musically. "And yet she is as loud in her declaration of his guilt as yourself."

"Oh, I have no doubt of that—all for effect," sneered the young man. "And to be on the popular side. You know it would be death—socially—for any one to assume the innocence of Eldridge Mortimer, in this community, just now."

"I don't think much of the devotion of a woman that would forsake a man in misfortune," declared the detective, earnestly. "But to return to the medal. Was there any contestant for the medal, so far as you know, who would have been likely to have harbored any ill-will on account of losing the prize?"

A strange light illuminated the young man's face.

"Come to think of it, I believe there was!" he exclaimed. "A fellow who took the matter to heart so that he afterward went insane and committed suicide."

"You don't say! What was his name?"

"Let me see," mused Clayburn. "Slouthers—George Slouthers was his name."

"Any relation to the old man named Reuben Slouthers?"

"His son."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and the old man took the death of his son so hard that he lost his reason, or nearly so, and left the country for some time. Nobody knew what had become of him, but all at once he put in an appearance again, but he never would live near anybody or have anything to do with them. In fact, he built him a little hut about a half a mile from the village and there he lives like a hermit. Sometimes he strays near the village, but the moment he sees any one he runs off like a wild deer."

"Do you not think it just possible that he might have murdered your brother in order to procure the medal?"

"No, the old man is harmless. He would not injure an insect if he could help it."

"But suppose I told you that I saw your brother's medal in his possession?"

"Impossible!"

"On the contrary, it is true."

"You must be mistaken."

"Would you recognize it if you saw it?" asked the detective.

"Yes, certainly."

Thad drew the medal from his pocket and held it up.

"Is that it?" he asked.

The young man turned pale and his eyes almost shot out of their sockets.

"My God! Where did you get it?"

"It matters not where I got it," replied Thad, coolly. "It was in the possession of old Slouthers up to last night."

Clayburn had grown extremely nervous and agitated.

"Are you sure?" he almost gasped.

"Quite sure," rejoined the detective, in icy tones.

"How on earth could he have come in possession of it?—I mean he must have—"

Here he became silent and became so confused that he appeared to be afraid to speak for fear of in some way committing himself.

"He must have what?" demanded the detective, sternly.

"I was about to say that—perhaps—that is, such a thing might be possible that—that—the old man—knew something about the affair," faltered the young man.

Here was another mystery. Why was the young man so reluctant to admit the possibility of anybody having had any connection with the murder except Mortimer?

Thad began to comprehend how thoroughly steeped in prejudice every member of the community was against the young physician, how unwilling they were to treat him with fairness, and he wondered how a jury had ever been found to acquit him at the trial.

"Yes, I deem it quite as likely that this old chap, crazed with grief and disappointment, should have murdered your brother as the young doctor, who, although a bitter enemy and a rival as you say, still had life and hope ahead of him, and having reasoning faculties, it is hard to believe that he would have sacrificed all on the altar of revenge."

"That is because you do not know Mortimer," rejoined the young man coldly. "When you know him as well as I do you will not hesitate to attribute anything to him."

"Is he so malicious, then?"

"I never saw his equal."

"By the way," interposed the detective sud-



denly, "were you aware that Miss St. Cloud wrote a letter to a friend, confessing that she had committed the crime herself?"

"I have heard so," rejoined Clayburn.

"You never saw the letter?"

"No."

"Would you recognize Miss St. Cloud's handwriting if you saw it, sir?"

"I think I would."

Thad drew out the letter which Mortimer had given him.

"Does that resemble it?" he asked.

Clayburn took the letter and examined it for some moments, and then without a word arose and went into another room. Presently he returned with a number of letters and laid them down upon the table in front of the detective. The latter drew several of them from their envelopes and examined them and compared them with the one he had, and he made the discovery that not only were they written by the same hand, and that hand Miss St. Cloud's, but that the missives themselves contained matter which corroborated Robert Clayburn's statement that she was betrothed to Roger. In fact, one of them contained this paragraph:

"Dear, dear Roger, you must not, shall not turn a deaf ear to my appeals any longer! Every day, every hour adds to my peril and endangers my honor! Remember what is at stake! Remember how I trusted you! Trusted you as I never did any other man! It may have been my weakness, I cannot say even now that it was your villainy, but you must save me. You cannot, shall not allow me to be cast on the world disgraced, to hear the world's scoffs and jeers! To hear those who now envy me my position in society, laugh as I skulk past them and say: 'How high she was, how low she has fallen!' No, before that shall occur, I will kill you and myself! I will plunge a knife into your heart as deep as my love, and then silence my own aching heart with the same blade, dripping with your heart's blood, so that my heart may drink the blood of the heart for which it throbbed!"

"Um!" mused Thad. "That woman meant business, if I'm any judge. Have you perused these letters, Mr. Clayburn?" he asked, turning to the young man.

"Most of them," he replied dryly.

"This one, for example," pursued the detective, pointing to the paragraph just quoted. "Did you ever consider the significance of those words?"

"Yes, but knowing the woman as I did, I knew them to be idle."

"I should not consider them so. By the way, allow me to retain these letters for the present."

"With pleasure."

"One more question and I will leave you. Do you know anything about this man Martin Hopkins?"

"I know that he is a sort of a petty lawyer, with about brains enough to engineer a push-cart or a peanut stand."

"What is his reputation for honesty and integrity?"

"I don't think he stands very high, especially for truth. He takes pride, I believe, in being the biggest liar in the village."

"Nothing like excelling in something," laughed the detective. "It isn't every one that can even excel in that line. He has an office, I presume?"

"Yes. Go right down on the main square, and anybody can tell you where to find him."

"I thank you," said Thad, extending his hand. "I will now bid you good-day."

"Good-day, sir. I hope you will soon succeed in showing up that rascal, Mortimer."

"I shall do so, if he is guilty, I hope," replied the detective. "But from the way matters look at present, some one else may come in for it."

"Impossible!" cried the young man vehemently.

Thad smiled and took his leave.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AN ODD CHARACTER.

A FEW moments' walk brought the detective to the business part of the village, which consisted of half a dozen blocks of one and two-story houses containing the stocks of the average village store, a few doctors' offices and a few lawyers' ditto. Among the latter Thad had no trouble in finding the office of the man he was seeking.

Over the door of a one-story dingy-looking wooden building hung a tin sign the letters on which were nearly obliterated by the weather of many seasons, which read as follows:

MARTIN HOPKINS,

Attorney and Counselor-at-Law.

The day being warm the front door was open and Thad walked in without ceremony.

No one was in the front room, but in the rear room, the door of which stood partly open, he could see that somebody was sitting at a desk, apparently writing with his face very close to his paper.

The detective pushed the door further open and strode into the rear room.

The person at the desk, who was a fat, heavy-jowled man with a bald head, did not look up,

and the detective walked close beside him, when he discovered that the fat man was asleep.

Before waking the man, Thad took occasion to glance about the place.

The front room was almost completely bare of furniture, a broken chair and a rusty stove comprising about all there was, and the rear office was not much better.

With the exception of the cheap, dilapidated little desk and couple of chairs with the backs whittled out of all semblance to their former shape, there was nothing; unless we name a box nailed on the side of the wall which did service as a book-case and contained four books—two law books, a Bible and a dictionary. The wall was decorated, besides smoke stains and streaks of tobacco-juice which had at various times been squirted up against it, with numerous highly-colored lithographs, all badly smoked and fly-specked.

Indeed, flies seemed to have their own way in the place. The ceiling was black in spots with clusters of them, they hung in knots on a festoon of cut tissue-paper suspended from the ceiling, and collected in patches on the sleeping man's bald head or swarmed about his nose.

After waiting a reasonable time for the sleeper to awake, and he did not, Thad brought his fist down on the desk in front of the fat man with a tremendous thump.

The sleeper started back so violently as to nearly tumble over and snapped a very tough snore in two.

He grunted, rubbed his eyes, yawned and finally looked up.

He eyed the detective for about a minute, and then said:

"Did you do it, sir?"

"Do what?" demanded Thad, unable to keep a straight face.

"Fire."

"Fire? Fire what?"

"That's what I'd like to know. Somebody 'bout here fired off somethin' just now."

With that he got himself upon his feet, waddled to a small window at the rear, pushed open a wooden shutter and peered out for a long time.

At length he shook his fist at some imaginary person or object outside, mumbled to himself, and returned to his seat.

"Them cussed boys," he explained. "Allus shoo'in' 'bout here. Fu'st thing anybody knows they'll turn in and kill somebody!"

"Oh, well, that will make business for you," laughed Thad.

"Nope. Not much," grunted the fat man.

"No crim'nal business fer me. I've got 'nuff of it."

"Don't pay, I suppose."

"Pay? No. Can't make yer salt."

"What was your last criminal case?" asked Thad, hoping to draw him out on the subject in which he himself was most interested.

"The last case? Lemme see. Oh, yes, I defended a feller what had committed a burglary."

"Win the case?"

"Nope. He got ten year, and I got nothin'."

"That was sad. But have you had no murder cases lately?"

Instead of answering, the fat man wheeled round on his seat, and stared at Thad for a full minute.

Finally he grunted:

"Stranger here, I reckon?"

"Somewhat," replied the detective.

"What's yer business?"

"I live down at Redbank," rejoined Thad, "and came up here to look after some property. I may need some legal advice."

"Um! Yep. Sit down."

And the fat man's cheeks assumed the proportions and appearance of toy balloons.

Thad sat down upon the only remaining chair in the room.

"This is Mr. Martin Hopkins, I take it?" remarked the detective, by way of a starter.

"The same," grunted the fat man, with a pompous wave of the hand. "And what did I understand your name ter be?"

"My name is Mortimer," replied Thad, in a quiet tone. "Edward Mortimer."

"What!"

The fat man almost jumped out of his chair, and his face assumed a crimson hue.

"Edward Mortimer," repeated Thad, coolly.

"No relation to the—the—to Doctor Mortimer, I hope?"

"His brother only."

"Hully chee! He's—I s'pose you know that he's—"

"Yes," interrupted the detective, assuming a very serious countenance, "I am aware that my brother has been tried for murder, but I am happy to say, he was acquitted of the crime."

"That was bec'us' the 'prosecutin' lawyers wasn't no account. If I'd been in tha'r places it would hev went different, I kin tell ye!"

"It was very fortunate for my brother that he had no such transcendent legal talent against him."

The fat man's cheeks expanded an inch larger.

"Yep," he grunted, "ye kin thank yer stars for that. I'd hung 'im as shure as shootin'."

"By the way, Mr. Hopkins, I have been informed that a young lady to whom my brother was engaged made an attempt to divert suspicion from him by assuming the guilt herself. That she went so far as to write you a letter in which she confessed the crime."

The old fellow pursed up his lips and opened his little round eyes as wide as they would permit of and stared at the detective.

"Who tole ye that?" he snorted at length.

"Never mind who told me. Is it not so?"

Hopkins appeared to be in a dilemma as to what answer to make, but finally was favored with an inspiration.

"Them's professional secrets," he growled, "an' I ain't got no right to give them away."

"Suit yourself about that, Mr. Hopkins," said Thad in a kindly voice. "My only motive in asking was to find out as far as possible all who did my brother any acts of kindness, professional or otherwise, when he was in trouble, so that I might be able to remunerate them. I believe my brother was not able to pay very liberally for legal or any other kind of services."

"Eh?"

And the fat man was on his feet in an instant.

"Why, come ter think on it, I do b'leve a young woman wrote me a letter somethin' like what you say. Lemme see—you say you propose ter pay all the bills?"

"Certainly, all just and reasonable ones."

"Wal, nobuddy kin say thet mine isn't reasonable and just."

"Yes? What did you do, for instance?"

"Why, when I got that letter—"

"Oh, you did get a letter, then?" interrupted the detective.

"Wal, yas—that is—"

"Who wrote that letter?" interposed Thad again.

"Why, Miss—that is, the young woman he was engaged to."

"I see. Do you recall her name just now?"

"Lemme see. No, I'll be switched—goin' ter settle everything up in cash, I reckon?"

"Certainly. What did you say her name is?"

The fat lawyer twisted and squirmed on his seat, grunted and at length put on a pair of large-rimmed glasses and began to fumble over some papers.

Thad waited for him to answer his question for some time, but as there appeared no likelihood of his doing it, the detective spoke.

"What did I understand you to say her name is, Mr. Hopkins?" he asked.

The fat man turned upon him and frowned.

"I didn't say as yit," he growled.

"But you are going to pretty soon, aren't you?"

"Don't know 'bout that."

"Look here, Hopkins," said Thad in an emphatic tone. "Let us get down to business. You want me to make you an offer. Very well, what will you take to tell the young lady's name?"

"Eh?"

The fat man was all smiles and affability again.

"How much hard stuff do you want," pursued Thad, pulling his chair up and speaking confidentially, "to tell me the name of the young lady who wrote that letter?"

The fat man shrugged his shoulders. Evidently he had been bribed on the other side not to tell.

"Wouldn't yer brother tell ye?" he at length asked.

"No matter, I want it from you."

"Um. If I c'd only remember—"

Thad laid a ten-dollar bill down in front of him.

"Will that be of any assistance in refreshing your memory?" he asked.

Hopkins's eyes glistened, but he hesitated.

Thad put another ten on top of the first one. The fat man's eyes sparkled still more and he licked his lips.

"That's the limit, Hopkins," averred Thad.

"What do you say?"

"Promise to keep it a dead secret—that is, that I told you?"

"Sure."

Hopkins still hesitated.

"Make it another ten?"

"Not another cent."

"S'pose I refuse to tell ye?"

Thad pulled out the letter.

"You see I have pretty good evidence as it is," he remarked.

"Hully chee! Wheer'd ye git that?" almost screeched the fat man, jumping to his feet again.

"It doesn't matter. You see I am already in possession of the information. All I want you to do now is to state whether that letter is genuine or not—that is, whether it was written by Miss St. Cloud or not—for which I will give you the twenty dollars."

Before he had time to answer a lady entered the front office, and Thad saw that it was Miss St. Cloud.

He attempted to conceal his face from her, but he was certain that she saw enough to recognize him.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## A LIVELY SKIRMISH.

THE moment Miss St. Cloud appeared in the front room the fat man became terribly agitated and hastened out to meet her.

As he went into the front room, he pushed the door to.

The two at once entered into an animated conversation, in which, although he could not catch what they said at first, Thad could tell that the woman was censuring the lawyer about something.

Finally Thad heard the fat man exclaim:

"A detective? Hully cheel! Said he was Mortimer's brother!"

Thad could not hear what the woman said in reply, but before the two had conversed very long he heard her say:

"Didn't Reuben tell you to look out for a detective?"

"Yep, but I didn't expect to see nobody like this chap. Why he looks jest like an ordinary business man—ain't got no uniform nor badge nor nothin'."

"Old fool!" she exclaimed.

And after that the voices became so subdued that the detective was unable to hear what passed between the two.

After fifteen minutes or so the fat lawyer opened the door separating the two rooms and returned to the rear office where he had left Thad.

The detective now saw that the woman was gone.

Thad was curious to know how the old chap would act now that he knew that he (Thad) was a detective.

He was also anxious to test his powers of fabrication.

So he began by saying:

"Lady friend of yours?"

"Yep. Miss Longford," he replied as coolly as though he had been telling the sacred truth.

"Ah, rather good-looking, isn't she?"

As Thad said this he poked the old chap playfully in the ribs.

"Hully cheel! Don't do that!" exclaimed the fat man jumping very lively for one of his weight. "Yep—client of mine. Powerful rich. Pays me more'n a thousand dollars a year in fees."

"Shouldn't wonder. By the way, do you know she resembles the young lady we were just speaking of—Miss St. Cloud—very much?"

"I don't see that she does," growled the fat man frowning ill-naturedly.

"I think she does. But let us get to business again."

"Business!" snorted the lawyer, glaring fiercely at the detective. "I have no business with you, sir!"

"N—?" coolly. "How about telling me whether that letter is genuine or not?"

"I don't know nothin' 'bout it," he growled.

"You won't tell me then?"

"Nope."

"Suppose I double the pile?"

"I won't do it."

"If I make it a hundred?"

"No, sir!" roared the fat man. "Nor fer five hundred!"

"I understood you to say just now that you didn't know anything about it," laughed Thad.

"And that is the reason you won't tell, is it?"

"Looker heer, I don't want ter hev nothin' ter do with you, sir! You think I don't know who you be, but I do. You're one of them consarned detectives! An' ye'll jest oblige me by gittin' right outen my office!"

"With pleasure, when you have given me the information I desire," rejoined Thad, coolly.

"Wal, ye won't git no information from me, so therel! Now git."

"Not just now," said Thad, in a quiet tone, resuming his seat and putting his feet up on the lawyer's desk. "Some other time."

"You won't git outen my place?" snorted the fat man, furiously.

"When you have given me the information I desire," rejoined the detective, taking out a cigar and lighting it. "Smoke?" he asked, proffering the fat man a cigar.

"Nope, I don't smoke, and you shan't in heer nuther! Git!"

Thad shook his head and said nothing.

The fat man flounced away somewhere, Thad did not notice where, but pretty soon he heard him coming back, puffing as he trudged.

Even then the detective did not pay any attention to him, and not until he was at his side again did the detective look up, and then it was to behold a very large revolver snoved under his nose.

"Now, will you go?" roared the infuriated shyster.

Thad did not stop to consider whether there was any real danger or not.

If he had known that there was it would have been much the same.

He could not restrain his laughter.

He roared.

"Will you get out of my office?" screeched the fat lawyer, dancing about the detective in an ecstasy of rage.

Thad still laughed.

And then to his utter surprise, the fat man blazed away!

How he managed to miss the detective is a mystery, as he was only a yard away, but he did.

But the ball came very close to its mark.

Thad heard it whizz so close to his ear as to make him shudder a little.

The next instant the detective was upon his feet and had the fat man by the throat.

"What do you mean?" he roared, shaking the lawyer till his teeth chattered like castanets.

"Do you want to murder me?"

The fat man could not have answered if he had been ever so much inclined, so firm was Thad's hold upon his throat.

"I have a great mind to choke the life out of you!" continued the detective, giving him another shake, which caused the fat man to relax his grasp on the pistol and it fell to the floor.

At the same time the purple hue of the lawyer's face warned Thad that he was choking him harder than he had thought for.

He was just about to release his grasp to give the fellow a chance to breathe when he was surprised and stunned by a terrific blow on the head from behind which staggered him.

Releasing his hold on the fat man and turning to see who his assailant was, he was astonished to see old Reuben Slouthers standing before him, with a club in his hand.

No sooner was he released than the fat man stooped to pick up the pistol.

But Thad was a little too quick for him.

First kicking the weapon across the room so that it would be out of the fellow's reach, he dealt the fat lawyer a blow in the ear that sent him reeling to the floor in a confused and shapeless heap.

By the time he had accomplished this he had business on the other side of the house.

For just as he straightened up from his blow the old man dealt him another blow with his club—or heavy cane as it really was. But this time the assailant was not so fortunate as to strike the detective on the head.

The blow fell on his shoulder and did not inconvenience him in the least except to smart a little.

The next instant Thad planted a blow between the old man's eyes which would have been enough to send any ordinary man to grass, but it scarcely staggered old Reuben.

Thad could not but wonder what kind of stuff he was made of.

The old man recovered almost instantly and made at the detective with his club again.

Thad saw that there was nothing to do but fight for his life.

For in addition to the almost superhuman strength he had just manifested, the unnatural glare of the old man's eyes reminded the detective that he was a maniac.

The old man realized, mad as he was, that he had a powerful man to deal with, and that it was a matter of life or death, and he backed into a corner and glared at the detective like some wild animal.

Thad at once began to close in upon him, and he in turn began to wield his club so fast and furiously that nothing but death could be the portion of anything that came within its reach.

Thad did not lose his self-possession.

Cool and calm he stood watching his opportunity, and when it came he made a spring and caught the maniac by the throat in spite of his club.

The detective found he had a different subject to deal with this time.

The fat man was an infant compared to this slender, wiry little old man, and in spite of Thad's powerful grasp the fellow wormed himself free as easily as though a child had been holding him.

Thad could not understand it.

He had handled all kinds of men, some of them desperadoes, but he never got hold of any one with this man's strength.

As soon as he extricated himself from the detective's grasp, the old man dropped his club, and while his eyes glared more satanically than ever, he drew a long knife from his bosom.

Thad saw that there was no chance for him at close quarters, and his only hope was to either get hold of the pistol—not imagining he would have any occasion for one in this peaceful village, he had left his at the hotel—and wound the maniac or frighten him.

He, therefore, made cautiously for the other side of the room, where he had kicked the fat man's pistol, still keeping his eyes fixed on those of the madman.

Slowly and cautiously he walked backward, his keen eyes riveted on the glaring orbs of the maniac.

At the same time the madman was following him up.

His murderous knife grasped in his hand, which was upraised, ready to strike at any instant, the maniac, half-crouching like a tiger, crept after him step by step.

It would not do to move too rapidly, lest the maniac should realize that his antagonist was retreating, and yet Thad felt that every instant added to his peril.

Slowly and cautiously as the detective moved,

however, he had not accomplished more than half the distance from his original starting-point, when the maniac evidently began to realize that he was the victor, for he began to crowd the detective, to desire to move faster, and a fiendish expression of exultation came into his face that was frightful to behold.

For the first time in his life Thad felt a slight tremor, resembling fear.

He had never known what it was to experience such a sensation when dealing with a sane man.

But it was different with a maniac, and such a one with the strength of a lion.

Thad collected all the coolness he possessed, however, and showed the madman that even he could not force him to move any faster.

This he did by putting on a bold front, and almost stopping in his backward retreat.

This had the desired effect for a moment, and allowed the detective an opportunity of gaining a good deal of distance toward the coveted weapon.

At length he was within a yard of it.

He had but to stoop and pick it up.

But here was the dilemma.

In stooping he would be compelled to withdraw his eyes from those of the maniac, and should he do this he realized that he would be lost.

The madman would seize the opportunity to spring upon him and plunge the murderous knife into him!

One more step backward and he stood directly over the pistol.

Now he was safe.

He could stoop and pick it up without taking his eyes off the maniac.

Even then he thought best to work a little strategy on the madman to divert his attention.

Therefore he glanced hastily at the floor and moved his foot in a peculiar way at the same time.

This gave the maniac to understand that there was something down there and his own eyes went to the floor instantly.

This was Thad's opportunity.

To stoop for the pistol while the maniac's eyes were diverted was but an instant's work.

And down went his hand in the direction of the pistol.

His fingers were within an inch of the coveted weapon.

Then an unforeseen thing occurred.

Thad had forgotten the existence of the fat man in his excitement over the madman, but he still continued to exist, and had by this time recovered from the blow Thad had dealt him.

So just as the detective put down his hand to grasp the pistol the fat man arose to a sitting posture and pulled Thad's legs from under him.

The next instant the maniac was on top of him.

## CHAPTER IX.

## A NIGHT OF TERROR.

WHEN Thad felt himself going down and the next instant saw the infuriated madman spring upon him with the murderous blade pointed at his heart, he thought his time had come.

But he did not lose his presence of mind or his courage.

On the contrary his situation spurred him up to a desperation that nothing could daunt.

Fortunately he did not fall upon his face as it was evidently the intention of the fat man to have him do, but on his side, so that he retained full use of his arms and could see what was going on.

Therefore when the maniac, as he fell upon him, struck what he intended to be the death-blow to the detective, the latter caught the wrist of the hand grasping the knife in his own powerful grasp and by a dexterous movement succeeded in wrenching the blade from the maniac's grasp.

Having done this the detective made an attempt to clutch the fellow by the throat, but the latter anticipated his motive, and quickly wrenching himself away, sprang to his feet.

Thad knew that it would never do to allow him to get any distance from him, and so attempted to jump to his feet also.

But when he made the effort he was horrified and chagrined to find himself pinioned from behind.

It was the fat man, who, although he had little action in an open encounter, was endowed with a powerful grip and any amount of weight, so that Thad was for the time helpless.

He would not have remained so long had he been given an opportunity, but he was not.

The short time that the fat man detained him gave the maniac a chance to regain his club and get back.

The moment the maniac reached the prostrate detective again, who was struggling in the grasp of the fat man, he began to rain blows upon him with his club in a most unmerciful manner.

This wrought Thad up to such a pitch of desperation that he exceeded himself in his heroic strength, and with one desperate effort, broke away from the lawyer, and a second later would have regained his feet had not the maniac at that moment taken advantage of the detec-



tive's defenselessness and aimed a well-directed blow at his head which, striking him across one of the temples, laid him prostrate and unconscious upon the floor.

What occurred after that Thad had no means of knowing.

Nor had he the remotest idea how long he remained unconscious.

On recovering his senses he found himself in a cramped position in a narrow apartment of some kind, and from the damp smell that pervaded the place, he judged that he was under ground.

It was very dark, but he could not tell whether it was the darkness of night or that he was in a dungeon.

On attempting to rise, which he did after surveying his surroundings or rather trying to penetrate the gloom, he found himself so stiff that he could not.

Moreover a dull pain in his head indicated that he had received a severe blow from the maniac's club.

When he put his hand up to his head the detective found it was bandaged and had been bleeding, for the bandage was saturated with blood.

This puzzled the detective.

He could imagine who had dealt the almost fatal blow, but who had shown him the kindness of dressing his wound?

Then an idea occurred to him.

Perhaps he was in the cell of a prison.

It would have been an easy matter for the lawyer, after Thad became unconscious, to have notified the authorities that he was a desperate character and had him locked up.

This he believed was the case, and it made him extremely nervous, especially as he was in such a weak condition that he could not help himself.

However, after rubbing his limbs vigorously for some time he found that the circulation increased and by little the stiffness left his limbs to such an extent that he was able to regain his feet.

When he had succeeded thus far the detective began to explore his prison.

He felt in his pockets for a match and having found one and lighted it, held it above his head and took a survey of his surroundings.

The room in which he was confined appeared to be about four feet wide, but so far as he could see, of interminable length.

This seemed strange.

It gave him the idea that he was in some kind of a tunnel.

He had no sooner made the discovery than he began to explore the passage.

As he had surmised, the passage led away for a long distance.

Thad continued along the passage for some minutes, sometimes lighting matches to survey his surroundings and at other times proceeding in the darkness.

He soon discovered that the passage was not constructed, if it had been constructed by man, with any view to regularity, for sometimes it widened out to the distance of ten feet and again became so narrow that he could scarcely squeeze himself through.

At times the roof was several feet above his head and at others so low as to compel the detective to stoop, and sometimes even go upon his hands and knees.

In his fevered, half-delirious condition Thad was unable part of the time to realize that this strange experience was not a horrible dream instead of reality.

At length, after nearly an hour's toil, he arrived in what appeared to be a large circular chamber, and here the passage ended.

Lighting a match and gazing about him, the detective saw that the only outlet was by way of a flight of rude steps—or more properly, a ladder—leading upward, but where they terminated he could not determine on account of the gloom.

Nevertheless, he determined to make an attempt at escape in that direction.

He at once began the ascent, therefore, and was not long in reaching the top.

He was notified of his arrival at the top of the stairs by his head striking against the trap or door which closed the outlet.

So impetuous had been his movements in ascending that he struck the door with such force as to almost knock him off the stairs, and set his already delirious head to humming in a dismal manner.

For some moments he could do nothing but cling on to the ladder to avoid falling and collect his scattered senses.

At length he recovered himself sufficiently he thought for another effort in the direction of liberty, and straightening up, he placed his shoulder under the impediment and surged with all his strength.

But it was no use.

The door was evidently snugly fastened from the top.

Escape was impossible, except he had assistance from without.

In his dilemma the detective sat down on one of the rungs of the ladder to rest and collect his thoughts.

It was very quiet, and he had not sat there long before he heard footsteps overhead.

Of course he could not tell whether they were the footsteps of friends or enemies.

He suspected they were those of his jailers, whoever they might be—possibly the maniac.

In that event, there was little hope of release, and escape was almost equally hopeless.

However, the sound of footsteps afforded some relief from the dread stillness of his present abode.

The detective listened for the sound of voices, and was soon rewarded by hearing the voices of two persons, apparently that of an old man and that of a girl or young woman.

This gave him a little hope and added greatly to his curiosity as to where he was.

In vain he tried to hear what they were talking about. He could not catch a single word. The thickness of the door reduced their conversation to a confused hum.

Hopeless as he felt the experiment to be, Thad tried the effect of pounding on the door with his fist in the vain hope of attracting their attention.

Once or twice he thought he had succeeded, for there came a lull in the conversation. But it soon began again, and no one came to his relief.

He at length despaired of effecting his escape in that direction, and began to consider the possibility of escape in some other.

There must, he reasoned, be another outlet to the tunnel or passage, otherwise why should it continue so far.

In his weak condition it would be a severe ordeal to retrace his steps through the narrow passage, with its frequent difficult places and its pent, unwholesome air, but this appeared to be his only hope of escape, if he ever expected to escape at all.

Moreover, he began to realize that he was in need of food, which added to his misery and distracted momentarily from his strength.

It was a matter of life and death, therefore, for him to escape, as he could not live long in that place.

The detective dragged himself down from the ladder and once more began his arduous and toilsome journey through the dismal passage.

He had not proceeded far when he felt himself growing so weak that he staggered as he went.

He would not sit down for fear that he should not be able to rise again, but he was occasionally compelled to pause and lean against the damp and reeking walls for support, after which he would trudge on again.

His progress was necessarily slower than it had been on the previous occasion, and therefore several hours elapsed before he even reached the spot where he had first found himself on recovering consciousness.

And how much further he would be compelled to travel he could have not even the remotest conception.

Again he trudged on, staggering as he went, and for the most part supporting himself by placing his hands against the walls of the passage. Several times he was on the verge of despair, and a less courageous nature under the circumstances would have lain down and given up to the inevitable, but Thad was not a man of that kind of metal. His motto always was, while there is life there is hope.

One or twice he was sure that he heard footsteps behind him, and as many times that he heard some one sigh or breathe with difficulty, but when he came to stop and listen he could hear no more of it, and he attributed it to imagination.

And he would stagger on, wondering if his toilsome journey would come to an end.

Finally, when his strength was about exhausted and he did not believe he could go another step, a sight met his gaze that filled his heart with joy.

It was a ray of light!

Not from a candle or lantern, but a ray of sunshine!

Where it came from he could not divine, but it streamed down upon the pathway a little way in front of him.

Weak and dispirited as he had been, it did not take him long now to reach the glad spot. The tunnel at this point made a sudden ascent, and evidently went up to the surface of the earth, and here the glad day was pouring in without let or hindrance and Thad saw no reason why he shouldn't make his escape the same way.

He was about to do so and had begun to climb the rugged rocks leading up to the outlet, when he was arrested by hearing the same sigh he thought he had heard several times before while making his journey, and turning around he was surprised to behold a young girl with long flowing tresses and large luminous eyes, standing before him.

#### CHAPTER X.

##### A MINISTERING ANGEL.

THAD was too much astonished at the apparition before him to speak for a moment, and could only stand and mutely stare at her.

The girl, although apparently modest and

timid, exhibited no embarrassment, which led the detective to think that she had seen him during his unconsciousness and had probably been watching him since, so that she was not surprised to see him now.

He had not gazed at the girl more than a minute, although the time appeared much longer to him, when he suddenly realized his position and decided to say something to relieve the awkwardness of the situation, but before he opened his lips the girl spoke.

"Don't go out that way, please," she observed in a soft, gentle voice, at the same time pointing up at the aperture overhead.

"Why not, young lady?" demanded Thad in a kindly tone.

"Because you can never get out alive," she responded.

Instead of an explanation, this only rendered the mystery more impenetrable, but before he had time to ask for any further explanation she interrupted him again.

Drawing a small basket from under her shawl, which he had not noticed before, she asked:

"Won't you have something to eat, sir? You must be hungry. It has been a long time since you tasted food."

In his anxiety to gain his liberty the detective had forgotten that he was hungry until the girl spoke. Even then he would not have paused so near the threshold of freedom had it not been for her former warning.

As it was he decided that it would be better to listen to her counsel, and if he was to have to fight for freedom, as it looked probable now, he felt that it would be better to have some nourishment first as he would make but a sorry fight in his present weak condition.

Descending to the bottom of the tunnel, therefore, he smiled gratefully upon the girl, and answered:

"You are very good. I am hungry."

Without another word the girl took a few steps forward, which brought her within the halo of sunshine that gilded the damp floor of the passage, and squatting down, proceeded to take some provisions from the basket and spread them out upon a jutting rock that seemed to have been made for nothing in the world but a table.

She did not raise her eyes from her task until she had completed it, and the detective watched her with an expression of mingled curiosity and amusement.

When everything was arranged to her satisfaction, she arose and turning to Thad, smiled childishly.

"There," she observed. "It isn't much, but it is better than nothing."

"Better than nothing?" ejaculated the detective. "It is a feast! And you are a veritable little angel for fetching it to me!"

The girl smiled faintly and blushed, but made no reply.

And Thad, without more ceremony, seated himself on a rock which jutted out from the opposite side of the passage in the right position for a seat at the table, and proceeded to discuss the dainty viands the girl had brought.

There was cold meat, fresh sweet butter, stewed fruits and a jug of delicious sweet milk, cool and refreshing.

The detective was too hungry to talk for some moments and devoted himself strictly to the tempting repast before him.

He did not cease to think of this mysterious ministering angel, however, and to wonder who she was and how she came to be in that place; indeed a thousand thoughts and speculations regarding her flitted through his mind in the few minutes he remained silent, satisfying his appetite.

Finally, when the pangs of hunger had been somewhat appeased, Thad glanced up from his novel board, and was surprised to find that the girl was gone!

Where had she gone?

This was as great a mystery as where she had come from.

In vain he endeavored to penetrate the gloom of the far-stretching tunnel. He could see nothing.

He listened, held his breath to listen, but with the exception of the sullen dripping of the reeking walls, he could hear nothing.

He was puzzled.

Then a horrible suspicion occurred to him.

Perhaps the warning she had given him, together with the luncheon, were all a device to detain him until she could summon some one who would prevent the possibility of his escape.

And she had probably gone to summon this assistance now!

But a moment's reflection showed him the folly of such a theory, for if his jailers, whoever they were, had any fear of his escaping, why had they not bound him hand and foot before leaving him, or else have locked him in a more secure place?

But his reverie was interrupted at this point by the sound of approaching footsteps, which were so light that the detective knew they could belong to no one but his strange visitor.

The next moment she hove in sight.

She came on up in a quiet, meek way, just as she had approached him before; when near



enough so that he could discern her features, he saw that the same calm, childish smile played about her lips.

He also noticed now that she was more than ordinarily beautiful, and bore a striking resemblance to some one he had recently seen, though for the moment he could not remember whom.

"Did you think I had deserted you?" she asked, in her simple, childish voice.

"I was afraid you had," was the reply.

A slight blush tinged her cheek, as she took a bottle from beneath her shawl and held it toward the detective.

"I forgot this," she said, simply. "Drink some, it will do you good."

Thad took the proffered bottle, and removing the cork, scented its contents.

Unless he was worse mistaken than he ever was in his life, it was brandy, and a very good quality.

The shadow of a suspicion flitted through his mind.

Could she have any evil design in giving him this liquor?

What could be her motive in desiring to injure him?

He spurned the thought promptly.

He was satisfied that nothing false or vicious could wear such an innocent face.

Smiling and nodding his obligations, therefore, he raised the flask to his lips.

He had not been mistaken.

It was the finest liquor he had ever tasted, and gave him new life and courage.

Another mystery now presented itself to him.

Where had the girl gone for the brandy?

He was satisfied that she could not have gone to the other extreme of the tunnel for it, for that would have taken her at least half an hour.

Stimulated with the brandy, and encouraged by her simplicity, he determined to find out something about his beautiful benefactress and his own whereabouts.

"I know you will pardon my curiosity, young lady," he began, smiling and speaking in his gentlest voice, "if I ask you to tell me where I am."

The expression of her face showed how surprised she was that he shouldn't have known where he was.

"Why, don't you know?" she asked, with wide-staring eyes.

"I haven't the remotest idea," he replied.

"Indeed? How did you get in here?"

"That is as much of a mystery as the other. Don't you know?"

"No, sir. The first I saw of you was when I found you lying in the passage, unconscious. I saw that you had been hurt, and dressed your wounds. I also tried to revive you, but could not, and was afraid that you were beyond hope. You must have been very badly hurt."

"I presume so. But that is not telling me where I am," persisted the detective.

"Why, in the old mine, of course," she replied, apparently incredulous that he should not know.

"Yes, but where is the old mine?"

Her face grew more puzzled than ever.

"Why, why—here," she finally faltered.

Thad saw that he would be compelled to adopt some other tactics.

"You warned me not to attempt to get out at the opening over our heads, awhile ago," he said.

"Now, perhaps you can tell me what danger there would be in it."

"Danger!" she exclaimed, turning pale.

"Why, sir, that opens out of the side of a cliff a hundred feet high! You cannot see it from the inside and, believing that it was only a step to freedom, you would walk right out to your death."

"Is there no way of getting down?"

"None that I know of."

"If I had a rope, for instance?"

She shook her head dismally.

"I do not know where you would get a rope long enough."

"How about the other end of the passage? That is closed by a strong door. Now tell me, who is the guardian of that door, young lady? In other words, who is my jailer?"

"Jailer?" she ejaculated, laughing. "You are not in jail. This is only the tunnel of an old abandoned coal mine."

"That may all be, but it does not alter the fact that I am a prisoner in it, and am likely to remain so unless you release me. Do you live in the house at the other end of the tunnel?"

"No, sir."

"But you came through the house to get here, of course?"

She seemed more surprised than ever.

"I came through no house, sir."

"How did you get in here, then?"

"Just came in at the entrance," she replied in a quiet voice.

"The door was open, then?"

"There is no door."

Thad was more and more puzzled with each revelation.

Was it possible that this apparently innocent girl was deceiving him?

"But," he uttered despairingly, "you came down the steps?"

"No, sir, there are no steps. I just walked right in at the entrance."

The light began to break at last.

There was another outlet to the tunnel.

How was it that he had missed it?

To make certain of this, he asked:

"Where you come into the tunnel did you never notice another branch running away off somewhere?"

"I have seen the main tunnel which runs away off into the mountains but I never dared to follow it, for it is miles to the end."

"You know nothing about where the end is, then?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know anybody who lives in the mountains?"

"No, sir, I don't know anybody about here except Reuben the Hermit. I visit him every day or two and take him something to eat."

"Were you there an hour or two ago?"

"This morning, yes, sir."

Thad began to think he saw daylight.

The hermit's cabin, if he did not mistake, was over the other terminus of the tunnel, and she was there when the detective climbed the ladder and tried to open the trap-door, and it was evidently her voice that he heard.

This also accounted for old Reuben's mysterious disappearance when Thad had followed him to the cabin.

The old fellow had evidently gone down into the tunnel.

"Well, my dear young lady, I suppose there will be no objection to piloting me out of this place, will there?"

"Certainly not," she replied cheerfully. "I will lead you out with pleasure, if you are strong enough to travel."

"Oh, I am strong now, thanks to your ministering," he exclaimed, rising and preparing to go.

The girl gathered up the few simple dishes she had brought with the lunch and put them into her basket, and then, without another word, started along the gloomy passage, followed by the detective.

No conversation passed between them for some moments after they started, but Thad's mind was full of speculations touching the girl, as to who she probably was, how she had happened to find him, etc., when she suddenly stopped and pointing to the ground, said:

"This is where I found you, sir."

Thad was about to make some further inquiry when he was surprised and horrified to see the dim outlines of a figure step in between him and the girl, rudely thrust her back and station herself in front of the detective.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A SAD DILEMMA.

THAD'S first impulse was to dash at the person, whoever he was, who had dared to step between him and liberty, and thrust him aside as ruthlessly as the person had thrust the girl out of his way.

But a second thought led him to consider that the person would in all probability be armed, possibly with a knife, and he would only be hastening his own destiny to rush at him in the way he had first contemplated doing.

And he hesitated.

But the hesitation was as fatal in its results as his first contemplated action could have been, or came very near being.

For no sooner had the fellow taken his position before the detective than he drew a revolver and fired directly at his head.

Thad was fortunate enough to have the darkness behind him, however, and the would-be murderer had been compelled to fire at random, and his bullet only grazed the detective's cheek.

The latter recovered his presence of mind at that moment to take advantage of the friendly darkness, and sprung backward into the gloom.

He could still discern an outline of his assailant, and saw that the latter was discomfited by his action.

The fellow moved nervously about and tried in vain to penetrate the gloom, but appeared to be afraid to venture into the darkness after the detective.

Thad, seeing that he had the advantage, decided to keep it, and accordingly kept on moving away from his adversary and deeper and deeper into the gloom, and when a little further advanced took to his heels and ran with all speed.

Two problems occurred to him as he ran along.

One was that he should have been able to see anything in the spot where he was stopped by the unknown person, whereas when he recovered his consciousness in this very spot he could see nothing.

This led him to the conclusion that it must have been night when he came to, and that the place was very near the opening spoken of by the girl.

The other problem was, how had this unknown person chanced to be in this particular spot at this time?

Was it possible that this apparently guileless

girl had led him out there intentionally that he might be murdered?

This did not look reasonable, for the fellow could easily have followed him to the spot where he ate his lunch and had a better opportunity of killing him.

The only solution to the problem seemed to be that this was the same man who had brought him into the tunnel, that he had carried him in only a short distance from the mouth of the tunnel and left him for dead, and had just come in on this occasion to see whether he had recovered or not.

If this was the case the man could be no other than the maniac.

The thought of his assailant being the maniac was anything but cheering, but Thad felt vigorous and strong after his late repast and had no fear of the madman.

He believed that he could outwit him when it came to a pinch, and had hopes of effecting his escape in some way without another encounter with him.

His rapid pace soon brought him back to the place where he had eaten his lunch and again he was gladdened by the sunshine pouring in at the aperture.

And then an idea occurred to him.

Possibly the girl had not told him the truth about the opening coming out of the face of a cliff, and that after all he would be able to make his escape in that direction.

It was worth the trial at all events.

The detective climbed up the rugged pile of rocks leading to the opening to the point where he was when the girl called him back, but from that place could see nothing except the sky, so he pulled himself up a little higher.

Still he could not see below or outside except from above.

The aperture was very narrow here and grew narrower as he approached the opening.

Still the detective clung on to the slippery sides and climbed higher.

Here the passage had grown so small that he had difficulty in squeezing his body through, but still he persisted.

Once he thought of the possibility of the maniac coming up behind him while he was crowded into this small space and of his hopeless situation under the circumstances, but he soon became too much absorbed with the thought of regaining his liberty to allow the other matter to prey upon his mind to any great extent.

Using his best efforts Thad forced himself a few inches further into the passage, and could now see that it was still seven or eight feet further to the outside, but could see nothing of the opening's location, whether it was level with the ground or a hundred feet above.

After pausing for breath he forced himself still higher, and to his surprise, found less impediment to his progress.

He could not understand this as the passage appeared to narrow, but the mystery was explained a moment later.

Fixing his feet in the sides of the wall he pushed his body up several inches higher, and as he did so lost his hold upon the jutting rocks above him.

This caused him to plunge forward and he saw that the outlet ran downward as well as upward at the terminus.

Losing his balance, he shot down this groove with the rapidity of lightning.

When it was too late, he saw that what the girl had told him was true.

The opening was at least a hundred feet from the ground!

As the detective plunged down this steep decline toward the outlet and death, he made frantic efforts to regain a hold upon something, but his descent was too fast and the rocks too slippery.

Out shot his head over the yawning abyss a hundred feet below, and his eyes caught a glimpse of where he was going.

He lost all hope!

Another second he would be dashed to pieces among the rocks below, and he shut his eyes.

But just as he rounded over the edge of the rock a jutting crag caught in the folds of his clothing and brought him to a sudden halt.

Still he was little better off.

There he hung, head downward, and a single move was likely to cause the garment to tear out or slip off the point of the rock and precipitate him down to destruction.

Thad had been in many tight places, but this was the worst he had ever experienced.

He did not lose his courage, however.

A moment before he had thought that all was over, but the moment the jutting crag brought him to a standstill he believed that he would get out of his difficulty with his life.

His greatest danger was in turning over. His feet were so nearly perpendicular over his head that it was difficult to keep from turning a somersault forward.

He paused a moment to think, and at the same time felt cautiously about with his hands.

As he moved his hands about on the outside of the wall one of them came in contact with something that resembled a rope.

The detective's heart leaped for joy!

It might be only a root, but it appeared to



be strong and would assist him to keep his position.

But what good was it to keep his position?

He did not consider this. Like a drowning man that catches at a straw, he clung to this slender hope eagerly and heroically.

There was a vague chance of the girl returning to his rescue and dropping him a rope, he thought.

He never stopped to consider the impossibility of the girl's climbing to the point necessary to drop a rope.

As soon as he discovered the object which resembled a rope, and found that it had some strength, he grasped it with both hands with the grip of desperation.

In doing so he did the very thing he had been so anxious to avoid, shifted himself loose from the crag, his feet shot forward and he turned a somersault in the air.

The next instant he struck the side of the cliff below, but still clinging to the rope-like object, did not fall.

He slid down several feet, however, on account of the momentum gained by the somersault, and as he did so expected every instant to arrive at the end and be cast down to the bottom of the abyss.

"Fortunately, however, he succeeded in stopping himself before he slipped very far and clung on more firmly than before.

Having in a measure regained his composure the detective plucked up courage to look below him, when he was delighted to see that what he was clinging to was in reality a rope, and that it extended many feet, he could not divine how many, below him.

Realizing the folly of attempting to get back into the passage, he soon decided to slide down as far as the rope would reach and see what the prospects were from that point.

So, loosening his grip, he glided down, down until it seemed as if he had gone miles, and still he was nowise near the bottom, nor was he anywise near the end of the rope, as he was pleased to observe.

Down, until his hands felt as if on fire, and yet he had not reached the end.

He finally struck a ledge, and decided to stop on it to rest his hands and survey the remainder of the distance, as well as to see whether his rope was long enough to touch the bottom.

The ledge was wide enough for him to stand upon comfortably but he could not see while standing on it anything below, so that it was impossible to decide how much further it was to the bottom or how much longer the rope was.

He was about to throw himself upon his stomach to peer over, and had grasped the rope again to steady himself for that purpose, when he felt a strange movement of the rope as though some one had hold of it.

This caused the Headquarters Special to look up, when what was his horror to behold the face of a man peering out of the outlet to the tunnel above.

At first he could not make out who it was, and was fearful lest it might be the girl; but a second glance not only convinced him that it was a man, but that it was the maniac!

As soon as old Reuben was aware of the fact that the detective had observed him he broke out in a wild demoniacal laugh.

A horrible suspicion now came over Thad; suppose the fellow should take it into his crazy head to cut the rope!

It would be no more than he could expect of a maniac.

What puzzled Thad was how the fellow held himself in position, as he himself well knew how difficult it was to remain there.

The gravity of the situation was certainly startling.

To be left on the ledge was worse than being in the tunnel, for here there was no chance of escape unless some one should drop a rope down, which was not to be expected.

There was but one thing to do, therefore, and that was to grasp the rope and reach the ground, if possible before the fellow would have time to execute his fiendish design, if he had such.

His only fear was that the rope did not reach the bottom, or near enough to it for him to jump the remainder of the distance.

Nevertheless, that was his only hope, and without further action, he sprang forward and grasped the rope.

No sooner had he done so than the same wild, fiendish peal of laughter rung out again, and the detective's heart sunk within him.

However, he began to glide down once more.

He could feel the rope vibrate in that peculiar way that told him plainer than words that it was being slowly but surely sawed in two by a knife.

And then scarcely had he descended his own length below the ledge, when a shrill scream from above caused his heart to stand still.

It was a woman's voice.

"Don't go any further!" came the voice. "You will never reach the bottom alive! Climb back upon the ledge, and I will save you!"

Thad hesitated.

He could not see why he could not reach the

bottom as quickly as he could climb back to the ledge, and then came the voice in a more frantic tone of supplication than before.

"Don't, for God's sake, attempt it!"

Thad decided to take her advice.

He began to pull himself up again, and another stroke would have drawn him upon the ledge.

But at that moment he felt the rope quiver in his hands, and the next instant he heard it part above with a sharp crack, and he felt himself falling down to the horrible depths below!

Another wild peal of laughter rung out, but this time it was accompanied by a woman's despairing wail.

## CHAPTER XII.

### AN IMPORTANT CLUE.

WHEN the rope broke, and Thad felt himself being dashed down to the bottom of the chasm, he did not expect or even hope to escape instant death.

For the second time in his life—indeed, for the second time in the last few hours—he closed his eyes and resigned himself to his fate.

But it was not to be.

Scarcely had he descended ten feet from his original point, when he stopped with such a sudden check as to nearly throw him off the rope, to which he still clung with the desperation of death.

For a full minute he could not understand what had happened.

In his half delirious state he was at first inclined to think that he had brought up in eternity with a sudden shock.

But he gradually recovered his self-composure, and opened his eyes to see the sunshine.

Then he looked up.

He was hanging not more than ten feet below the ledge.

Away up above he could discern a small, dark spot, which he knew to be the outlet of the tunnel.

In the center of this spot were two faces, one above the other.

One was that of the girl who had brought him the provisions, and the other was that of the maniac.

Both faces wore an expression of surprise.

But they were different kinds of surprise.

The girl's was the kind of surprise one has when he expects a terrible calamity and it does not happen, and the other the surprise of the fiend who finds that the deadly shot he has sent after a human being has not hit its mark.

And both were staring down at the detective with all their eyes.

Thad had time for but a glance up at these mysterious people, however, for he had all he could attend to to look out for himself.

His first object was to ascertain what had caused him to stop short of destruction, and his second to discover some means of getting down from his hazardous position.

He was a little afraid of moving about much at first lest he should un'itch the rope—if indeed it was fastened—and precipitate himself below.

But he soon discovered that there was nothing to fear from that source, and he at once proceeded to climb up to the ledge again.

The moment he got on the ledge he discovered what had caused the rope to stop as it did.

Away up, half way between him and the outlet of the tunnel, were two jutting rocks which resembled a pair of scissors partly open.

When the rope, after being severed by the maniac's knife, shot down, it happened to glide between these two rocks, and as it drew in closer and closer to the narrow cleft it finally caught and could glide no further. So it was as firmly fixed as it had been before.

Feeling satisfied that there was no longer any danger of descending on the rope, he lost no more time in speculations, but at once grasped the rope again and glided down to the bottom.

He found himself in a rather wild, rocky region, but he was too much elated over regaining his liberty to complain, and at once set out to find his way back to where he had started from—the village.

A toilsome climb of half an hour brought him to fairly level ground again and he proceeded with little difficulty.

After he had reached the high ground he saw that he could pass the hermit's hut without going much out of his road, and determined to do so.

Trudging on for half an hour he arrived at the hut and, approaching the door, peered in.

As he half expected, no one was there, and the detective went inside.

Looking about he espied the trap-door which he had attempted to raise from the under side, and it was unfastened now.

That proved pretty conclusively that the hermit or maniac had gone into the tunnel from that direction and that he was still in there, unless he had gone out another way.

"If he has any notion of coming out this way," mused Thad, "he will meet with the same disappointment that I did."

With that he fastened down the trap so that it could not be raised from beneath.

He had no more than got the door well fastened down when he heard some one ascending

the steps and try the door, and then he heard first grumbling and growling, and later loud talking.

This did not last long, however, when he heard the person descend the steps again and all became silent.

Thad did not know what minute after that he might expect the hermit back, and as he (the detective) was not armed, he did not care about meeting him again just then.

Thad therefore left the hut and made his way back toward the village.

As he went along ruminating over the events of the past twenty-four hours and of his remarkable adventures, it occurred to him that he had had some valuables on his person when he entered the fat lawyer's office, and wondered if he had lost anything.

With that he proceeded to go through his pockets.

He found that his watch was safe and that his pocketbook was in his pocket, and he began to think that he had been dealing with extremely honest people for would-be murderers, when he made a discovery that quickly changed his mind.

The medal was gone!

A little more research proved that the letters supposed to have been written by Miss St. Cloud were also missing.

This caused the detective more distress than the loss of his purse ten times over, for a good part of his work would have to be done over again.

On his way back to the village Thad could not resist the temptation of passing through the grove, which, since his strange adventure there, possessed a sort of fascination for him.

It was growing late in the afternoon when he reached the grove, and being fatigued from his long walk and weak from his recent wounds, he sat down upon the same fallen tree where he had sat when he first saw old Reuben, the crazy hermit, and where he had heard the conversation between the old man and Miss St. Cloud.

For a long time the detective sat there lost in thought and the day gradually faded into evening, and the shadows began to thicken in the deep umbrage of the grove, when some inexplicable impulse induced him to get from his seat and step across to the opposite side of the road.

Perhaps his mind had been running upon the incident of the evening—he had first seen the maniac, when the latter, after going through his wild gyrations, had plunged into the thicket.

For some moments the detective stood gazing at the spot where the maniac disappeared into the thicket.

There was something there that attracted his attention.

He was uncertain of it at first, but as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom the thing came out clearer, and he saw that he was not mistaken.

It was a track—and made by a woman's shoe!

This was a surprise, inasmuch as the woman whom Thad had seen in company with old Reuben did not go into the thicket, but came along the road.

A suspicion flashed upon him.

Could the track belong to the girl whom he had met in the tunnel?

The theory seemed plausible, and yet what could she have been doing, there with the maniac?

Was she leagued with the madman in his devilish operations, or did she follow him about for the purpose of trying to thwart his plans as she appeared to be doing when she implored Thad not to descend on the rope which she knew to be cut?

Without speculating much further in this direction, the detective proceeded to follow the trail further into the thicket.

This was no easy task, as the undergrowth was very thick and badly tangled and the shadows of coming night were rapidly deepening. Still the detective pursued the trail, parting the tangled bushes and examining every inch of ground till he would discover a track and then move on in search of the next one.

He had been thus occupied for more than an hour and had penetrated the thicket a dozen yards or so, when something in the trail—in one of the tracks, in fact, attracted his attention and caused him to suddenly pause.

It was when he had been unable on one occasion to make out whether a certain indentation was the track he had been following or not, and he had lighted a match to examine the spot.

The moment the glare of the match illuminated the dark pathway his eye caught the flash of some bright object.

Stooping to pick it up, the detective found it to be a revolver—a small silver-mounted Smith & Wesson seven-shooter.

Lighting another match and examining it, he soon discovered that the weapon had not been dropped there recently, but from the rust that had accumulated upon it, it had evidently lain there a long time.

Further investigation revealed that the weapon had not been dropped into the track, as was his first impression, but that the foot which



had made the track had stepped upon the revolver and pressed it deeper into the soft, yielding soil.

The detective also noticed that one chamber was empty and the remaining six loaded.

He knew that the murdered man had received but one charge, and that the ball was that of a thirty-two caliber weapon.

It seemed clear enough, then, that this was the identical weapon used in committing the murder.

The next point was to learn, if possible, who the owner of the pistol was.

Too impatient to wait till he should reach his hotel where he would have plenty of light, Thad lighted another match and proceeded to examine the pistol then and there.

He had not done so more than a minute or two when he made a discovery.

It was the initials "R. C." engraved on the silver work of the handle of the revolver.

"R. C.," mused the detective. "What can that stand for? I have it!" he exclaimed aloud, after a moment's reflection. "Roger Clayburn! The young man was killed by his own weapon! If it had been found on the spot where he was, I should set it down as a case of suicide. Heavens!"

This exclamation was caused by a second thought, which just then flashed upon him.

"R. C." also signified "Robert Clayburn!"

Perhaps, after all, the pistol had belonged to the murdered man's brother.

Could it be possible that he had had anything to do with the—

But no, that was hardly to be thought of for a moment.

Why should he murder his own brother?

Still, Thad remembered hearing him say that he was the sole heir to his father's estate.

He would not have been sole heir if his brother had lived!

Perplexed with these conflicting questions, the detective made his way—not to his hotel—but to the office of the leading surgeon of the city, where he had his wounds dressed, after which he returned to the hotel and got his supper.

He then went directly to his room with the intention of retiring at once to recuperate himself for the morrow's work, but he had no more than got into his room when he began to reflect upon the best mode of procedure for the future.

He hadn't reflected long before he came to the conclusion that his best move would be to return to the city for a few days until his wounds were sufficiently healed to permit the bandages being taken off.

This he felt would be necessary, as his future work would necessitate more or less disguising, and this could not be done so long as his head was bandaged.

As soon as he had arrived at this conclusion, the detective went down to the office to learn how soon the first train would go toward New York. He was informed that a train was due in about an hour, and he at once prepared for the journey.

On his way to the depot the detective thought it might be as well to conceal the fact that he was leaving the village as much as possible, so he stopped in an obscure spot and affixed a full beard to his face.

The beard was long and shaggy, and by wrapping a mantle about his head, he concealed his bandages and gave himself the appearance of an immigrant from Poland at the same time.

He had just taken his seat in the car when two men came in and sat down in the seat directly in front of him. They paid no attention to the old Polack, but entered at once into a confidential conversation, in the course of which Thad heard his own name mentioned, coupled with references to the murder. He managed at length to catch a glimpse of the speakers' faces.

One of them was Robert Clayburn, but the other was a stranger whom the detective had never seen before.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### A NEW PHASE OF THE CASE.

FOR awhile the two men conversed in such subdued tones that, with the noise of the train, the detective was unable to catch enough of it to understand the drift of the talk.

He had been attracted to them by hearing his own name pronounced, and he felt sure that their conference had some reference to the case upon which he was at work, and consequently he was interested in what they were talking about.

But for a long time even his keen ears failed to catch enough to make it comprehensible.

After a while, however, they appeared to get warmed up and grew less cautious.

And then Thad began to catch snatches here and there, and finally whole stretches of the conversation.

He found that he was not mistaken in regard to the character of their conversation.

They were talking about the murder of Roger Clayburn.

Robert Clayburn, who as we have seen, was

one of the men, appeared to be extremely nervous.

"Are you sure that the detective is still in the village?" Thad heard Robert's companion ask.

"I am not sure of it," replied Clayburn; "but it stands to reason that he would not leave there until he had made some headway on the case."

"Unless he got discouraged with his failure to discover what he was after and threw it up," laughed the other.

"Those that know Thad Burr best say that he is not the man to give up as long as there is the ghost of a prospect of success."

"Pshaw! That may be his record," sneered Robert's companion, "but detectives' records are like the sale of patent medicines—large in proportion to the amount of advertising they receive. This man is as liable to fail as any other, and in this case, if things stand as you think they do, he is sure to run off on the wrong trail. I'd stake my life he will never strike the right scent. You say that he hasn't been seen about the village for a day or two, and you can depend upon it he has quietly left. Unless perhaps—You say he was seen last at Hopkins's office?"

"Yes."

They both laughed heartily as though there was something extremely funny in the fact of Thad having been seen last night at the office of the fat lawyer.

Thad did not understand this at the moment, but he did a little later.

"Perhaps—ha! ha! ha!" laughed the stranger, "perhaps the fat man could tell something about his present whereabouts."

"Perhaps," chuckled Robert.

"Do you imagine the old tub of entrails has courage enough?"

"Oh, yes, he has courage enough for anything if there is anything worth while in it."

"But do you think she would have gone so far?"

"Gone so far? She will stop at nothing."

"You have no reason to worry then."

"I do not know about that. I wish I could think so. If I only knew what had become of the pistol I would feel more at ease."

"Has that never been found?"

"No, at least so far as I know. If it should turn up just at the wrong time it would make things unpleasant all round."

"I cannot see why. Are you sure that any one would recognize it at this late date?"

"Recognize it? Of course they would. It has my initials engraved on the handle."

The stranger was silent a moment.

At length he said, half musingly:

"R. C. I say, old fellow!" he suddenly exclaimed, his face lighting up as with an inspiration, "who the deuce is to tell whether those are yours or your brother's initials, if you keep your mouth shut?"

"Plenty of people would recognize it as mine if it hadn't a letter on it."

"Why, what was there about it peculiar?"

"The peculiar shape of the handle. I had it made on purpose so that it would be different from anybody else's."

"That is deuced unfortunate. Too bad you didn't content yourself having a pistol like other people. However, it is too late now, and let us hope that the pistol has not and will not be found."

"I hope not, but the medal was found and there is no more reason to believe that the pistol will not be than there was for believing that the medal would not be found."

"Where was the medal found?"

"I have not the slightest idea."

"How do you know that it has been found then?"

"I saw it."

"In whose hands?"

"The detective's."

The stranger whistled.

"Here is a go! I wonder where he ran across it."

"That is a mystery, and the same mysterious process may bring the tell-tale pistol to light."

"Possibly, unless we can do something to prevent it. Now, if I am to take this case in hand for you," continued the stranger, growing confidential, "I want to know all about it, all the details, how it came about and how it was carried out, and so on."

Robert Clayburn glanced cautiously about to ascertain whether any one was listening to the conversation, and Thad was unfortunate enough to allow him to see him in an attitude of attention.

He appeared to suspect the detective at once, for he whispered to his companion, whereupon both men glanced at Thad and looked suspicious.

But the stranger after looking Thad over for a few seconds, turned to Robert with a laugh and observed:

"That old Polack? I'll bet my hat he can't understand enough English to ask for his dinner!"

"Don't be too sure about that. Some of these old chaps know more than they appear to. I'll admit that this old villain looks dumb enough, but the chances are he can speak and understand English as well as a native."

"A native of Poland, perhaps."

They both laughed again, after which Robert said:

"At all events, I do not propose to risk it."

"Very well, we can speak so that he cannot hear us."

And from that on Thad could not catch a word of what they were talking about.

He had heard enough, however, to satisfy him that there were more people connected with the murder than he had at first imagined.

That the murdered man's own brother was in some way connected with it, there did not now appear the shadow of a doubt.

But whether it was criminally or that he was merely trying to screen some one else was hard to determine.

The other man appeared to be a detective or lawyer, and Thad was lucky enough to catch his name, which was Augustus Langley. Clayburn appeared to be on very intimate terms with him, for he called him "Gus" in addressing him. Thad noticed that he was a tall, dark-complexioned man with a keen eye, a refined and rather handsome face and an extremely gentlemanly manner.

The two young men appeared to give the detective no more thought, and plunged into their confidential conversation completely, forgetting his very existence.

Finally the train reached Jersey City and the two young men took the ferry for New York.

Thad shadowed them at a safe distance after they got ashore.

They walked up to the Park Place station of the Sixth Avenue elevated and there took the train for up-town.

Thad was on the same train, and saw them get off at Twenty-third street and walk over to Twenty-sixth street and Broadway and enter the St. James Hotel.

The detective sauntered round till he saw them register and leave the house.

They now made their way across toward the east side again and turned down-town two blocks to Twenty-fourth street.

They followed this street until they reached the middle of the block between Fourth and Madison avenues, and here Langley unlocked a door and the two entered, leaving the detective on the street.

Thad knew that this building was occupied principally as offices, and he at once came to the conclusion that Langley was a lawyer and that this was his office.

It was now about eleven o'clock at night, Thad concluded that the best thing he could do was to go home, and obtain a little rest, a thing that he was sadly in need of.

But it appeared that this was not to be, for he had no more than reached the first corner when something occurred to turn him from his purpose.

Just as he reached the corner and was about to turn it a woman passed him, walked to the corner, paused, looked up at the street-lamp as if to ascertain in what street she was and then turned and glanced at the detective.

Taking him for the same character that Clayburn and his companion had, she approached him after a moment's hesitation and asked:

"My good man, do you speak English?"

"Yah, purty vell," replied Thad, being the nearest to the Polish dialect that he could command on the spur of the moment.

"Will you tell me whether this is Twenty-fourth street or not?" she continued.

"Yah, it vas Dwendy-fourth," replied the detective.

"Thank you," she said, and started along Twenty-fourth street toward the east side.

The woman was closely veiled and dressed in black throughout, but Thad was sure he recognized the voice.

He allowed her to get a little in advance and then proceeded to shadow her.

As he expected she would do, the woman went as far as the building into which Clayburn and Langley had gone, and approaching the door, rung the bell.

A moment later some one whom Thad could not see from his place of concealment, came down and opened the door and the woman went in.

Thad's curiosity was too much aroused by that time to allow him to think of sleep, and so he waited to see what would come out of it all.

For a long time he waited and still no one appeared, and he was on the point of abandoning the watch, when a friend of his came along.

Of course his friend did not recognize the detective in his disguise, but the latter soon made himself known, and after they had chatted a little while, Thad said he must go home. But as he started to go he glanced back at his friend and saw that he was about to enter the same house that he had been watching.

"What are you going to do in there, Joe?" demanded the detective jestingly.

"I propose to sleep there to night," was the reply.

"Take in a room-mate?" asked Thad, still jesting.



"Certainly. There are two lounges. You may occupy one if you like."

Thad said no more, but accompanied his friend into the house and up-stairs.

He avoided speaking on purpose, and fortunately his friend did not say anything on the way up-stairs.

When they reached the room, which was on the second floor, Thad let his friend into the secret of his mission.

"A lawyer's office, did you say?" asked his friend.

"Yes. At least that is what I imagined it was."

"There is no lawyer's office in this building, but there is a detective who has a suit of rooms on the other side of the hall."

"Did you ever see this detective?" asked Thad.

"Yes."

"What sort of a looking man is he?"

"A tall, dark man, rather good looking."

"That's the chap!" exclaimed Thad. "How can I get near enough to the room to hear or see or both what is going on inside?"

His friend thought a moment, and then suddenly exclaimed:

"I have it! There is a vacant room next to it, and I have a key that will open it."

"Good?" and five minutes later Thad was in the dark room with only a thin partition between him and the three conspirators, as he supposed they were. And what was better still, there was a knot-hole in exactly the right place for him to see what was going on inside.

When he put his eye to the hole, he found that the woman had removed her veil, and then he saw that he was not mistaken in the voice when she spoke to him on the street.

It was Miss St. Cloud!

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### A MUTUAL PLEDGE.

THE three conspirators appeared to be greatly amused over something, and were laughing boisterously when Thad first looked in, but he was unable at first to make out the cause of their merriment.

A moment later, however, he saw something that not only explained why they laughed, but caused the detective a good deal of astonishment and disgust.

There were two objects, in fact.

One was a gold medal, which he recognized at once as the one which he had purchased of the Jew peddler, and the other was a letter, which he understood from their conversation, was the same that he had got from Eldrige Mortimer, and which was supposed to have been written by Miss St. Cloud.

As soon as the trio were done examining the objects, Langley turned to Clayburn and said:

"I do not think you have anything to fear now, old fellow."

Clayburn shook his head dismally.

"These are mere bagatelles compared with the lost revolver, Gus," he rejoined. "If I only had that in my possession, I would willingly surrender these things to the detective working on the case and let him make the most of it. These really prove nothing, while the pistol tells the whole story."

Thad began to think he was getting thick-headed, for he could not to save his life see why the pistol should be any more of a witness than the objects before them. Or rather he could not see how the three objects—the medal, letter and pistol—had any connection with each other.

The only light in which the detective could view the matter was that if one was brought into court it would prove one person guilty, while the other two would have to be used to convict somebody else or rather two other people.

For example, if the letter were to be proven genuine, it would convict Miss St. Cloud, the pistol would compromise Clayburn, and the medal—in case they could prove whose possession it had first been in after the murder—would be likely to make out a bad case for that person.

So that Thad saw he had a good deal to learn about the case.

At all events the revelations of the last day or two had pretty well dispelled the idea in the detective's mind that Dr. Mortimer was the murderer, and he began to wonder how the prosecution could have been so stupid as to even find a case against him.

And as for the three people before him, with all he had learned about them, together with what he could gather from their present conversation, he was at a loss to know which, if either, to fix the crime upon.

At times he felt almost sure that the woman had committed the crime herself or had it done, and at others that she was innocent of any connection with it. Then again he would make up his mind that Clayburn had murdered his brother, only to have the theory upset next moment and be convinced of his innocence. At one moment he was inclined to believe that old

Reuben, the maniac, had committed the murder unaided by any of the others.

In short, instead of what he heard and saw from his place of concealment throwing any light upon the mysterious case, it only served to perplex matters more than ever.

Only one thing seemed clear, and that was that the three were in league for some evil purpose, but what that purpose was it was impossible to gather from their veiled and ambiguous conversation.

The woman appeared to be bent upon carrying out some fiendish plot which was so heinous in its character that the men were shocked and appeared to be trying to persuade her out of it.

"I tell you, it must be done, even if I have to do it myself!" he heard her repeat over and over again. "Or, if worst comes to worst, I can fall back upon poor old Reuben. He never fails me."

"But what is the use of it now?" demanded Langley pleadingly. "You are safe enough as things stand now, and you only endanger yourself and add another crime to your soul by doing the other."

"That is what I tell her," interposed Clayburn. "Better let matters rest as they are. There is little or no chance of the detective discovering anything, covered as they are at present, but once disturbed there is no saying what may come out of it."

"Then you refuse—both of you—do you?" cried the woman, turning first upon one and then on the other with a savage scowl and a tigerish fire in her eyes.

Thad imagined both men turned a little pale. He began to see that they were in some way in her power and that they feared her.

He could hardly reconcile it with his recollection of the gentle, soft-spoken little woman whom he had met on the first day of his visit to Plainfield, but as he saw her now there was no disguising the fact that she was a desperate woman.

"Not exactly that," pleaded Clayburn. "Neither of us refuse, Dory, to do anything you desire. But you are unreasonable."

"That is what I think," reiterated Langley. "You ought to know by this time that we are willing to do anything in our power, within the range of reason, and it is not fair to ask us to go beyond that."

"So be it, then," she cried in a petulant tone. "If I am not to be obeyed I may as well know it first as last. But in return don't expect anything from me—not even mercy!"

This was uttered in a quiet manner, but her tones were so deliberate and caustic that no one could fail to see that there was a great deal behind her words.

Thad was sure they turned pale now.

The woman arose from her seat and strode toward the door.

When she had grasped the knob she turned and said:

"This I shall understand as your final decision. Good-night, gentlemen."

She was about to open the door then, when both men sprung after her and caught her by the arm.

She paused, and turning, scowled upon them.

"Well?" she said.

The men looked imploringly at her.

Neither seemed able to speak.

They were evidently paralyzed with terror.

"Well?" she repeated, in cold, unsympathetic tones. "Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, yes," gasped both men in a voice.

"When?" she demanded, sternly.

"Whenever you say."

"To-night?"

"That is impossible," interposed Langley.

"Impossible, to-night," repeated Clayburn.

"Why impossible to-night?"

"Because he is not here," replied Langley.

"Um! When will he be here?"

The men exchanged glances.

There was a chance of escape, it seemed.

"I don't know," finally faltered Langley.

"Perhaps in a week or two weeks."

The woman drew a memorandum from her pocket, and glanced over it.

"You are lying to me, and you know it!" she hissed. "Here is the date which you gave me yourself, Langley. He will be here to-morrow night. It must be then! Am I to be obeyed?"

The countenance of each man fell.

They assumed the expression of despair.

They glanced inquiringly at each other, and then appealingly at the woman.

But they gained neither information in the one direction nor encouragement in the other.

"Am I to be obeyed, or not?" she repeated.

"Yes," came the answer, in chorus, from both men.

"To-morrow night."

"Yes."

"Very well. You know the place?"

Again the men thought they saw an opportunity of escape.

By assuming ignorance, they thought, provided she shouldn't happen to know, would defer matters, at least.

Both men shook their heads.

"You do not know?" she almost hissed.

"Then I will tell you, and mind that you do not forget, for I shall be there to see that everything is carried out according to my orders."

She took a pencil from her bosom and wrote something on a sheet of the memorandum-book which she held in her hand, tore the leaf out, and handed it to Langley.

"There it is," she observed. "113 West Fiftieth street. See that you do not forget!"

And then without another word, she opened the door and left the room.

Ordinarily Thad would have followed her and ascertained where she went, but he had two reasons for not doing so on this occasion.

First of all he did not feel able to do so in his weak, fatigued condition, and in the second place, he saw no real necessity for it, as he knew where she would be on the following night anyway.

As soon as she disappeared the two men exchanged glances and their countenances assumed a troubled expression.

"Well?" groaned Langley, who was the first to break the silence.

"Well, we're in for it," rejoined the other, solemnly.

"We're a pretty pair of asses to allow ourselves to be pulled into this thing by that woman! I begin to think we are a pair of cowards. What do you think?"

"I am of pretty much the same opinion," reiterated Clayburn dismally. "Still, what could we do?"

"Held out. Resisted her."

"That is all very well to talk, but you know as well as I what that would have meant."

"It would have meant nothing, and we are a pair of idiots to allow that woman to make us believe so."

"What is the use of talking that way now?" growled Clayburn. "The thing is done. Why did you not think of this while she was here—before we committed ourselves?"

"Because I had not the nerve."

"And what is the use of talking about it now?"

"Because my courage has returned since she left."

"Yes," sneered Clayburn. "And what do you propose to do?"

"I propose to resist her for the future!" affirmed Langley.

"Yes?"

"Yes, sir."

"How about to-morrow night?"

"Pay no attention to the affair—not go near!"

"But your promise?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Do you not value your word?"

"In such a case—no!"

"Then you will break it?"

"I will."

"Gus, I never expected this of you."

"Great Heaven! Is the breaking of my word to a vicious woman as wicked as the commission of—"

"Sh-s-s-sh!" cried Clayburn, putting his hand over his mouth. "We might be overheard. Then you seriously intend to defy her for once, do you?"

"Yes, and for all time to come! I tell you I am done with her, and she may do her worst. I do not fear her."

"You may regret your step. Still, I wish I had courage to do the same thing."

"So you have, if you only make up your mind. Let us stick together, old man, and coolly defy her, and we will come out all right. We will not go near there to-morrow night, and if she don't like it, let her make the most of it."

Clayburn was silent for some moments.

"Suppose she takes it into her head to expose the other matter?" he finally suggested.

"Suppose she does? What can she prove, without criminating herself?"

"Not much, that is true. Still she would be just desperate enough if she was thwarted in her plans, to suffer herself for the sake of having her revenge upon us."

"Don't you believe anything of the kind. She is desperate enough, I grant you; but when it comes to the pinch, you will see her weaken as well as any one else. What say you, old fellow? Be a man!"

Clayburn still hesitated.

The expression of his face showed that a series of conflicting emotions were struggling with him.

Finally his brow cleared and putting out his hand, he said:

"It is a go, old fellow. I am with you."

Langley grasped his hand warmly.

"Henceforward we are men!" he declared.

At that moment the door opened and Miss St. Cloud stepped in!

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### MEETING AN ACQUAINTANCE.

THE two men could not have been more startled had a thunderbolt struck within ten feet of them.

Their countenances fell, and the expression of defiance entirely vanished and gave way to something akin to terror.



They looked at each other in a helpless sort of way, but did not have courage to meet her gaze.

In the mean time the young woman stood calm and impassionate gazing at them.

For a long time neither spoke.

The woman was the first to break the silence.

"Well?" she began, in a calm, incisive tone, "what have you to say for yourselves?"

Neither man appeared to have the courage to reply.

She waited to give them a chance.

Still they remained silent, and Thad could see that they were deadly pale and began to tremble violently.

"So, you have made up your minds to defy me, have you?" she resumed after she had apparently despaired of receiving an answer from either of them.

As she still received no reply, the woman continued:

"Very well, gentlemen. You imagine that I will do nothing in the matter, do you? You imagine that when it comes to the pinch I will weaken like the average woman rather than suffer myself. You are mistaken. Even if there was the least fear of my having to share your punishment and disgrace, I would gladly do it rather than see you go unpunished. If you do not believe it, however, continue in the course you have just mapped out and see for yourselves. Let me see how long you will adhere to your resolution to be men! Good-night."

And again opening the door, she was about to depart.

And the men did exactly what she wanted them to and what she knew they would do.

They caught her arm and detained her.

She paused as before, stared sternly at them for several seconds, and finally came out with the inevitable—

"Well?"

"It's no use. We, we—" faltered Langley.

"Yield," interposed Clayburn, helping him out.

"I thought you would," she observed, quietly. "But will you stick to this? Can I depend upon you?"

"Yes," answered both men, humbly.

"Very well. I will give you one more trial. But you must not tempt me too far. There is a limit to my temper. Good-night."

And, opening the door, she disappeared as noiselessly as she had come.

She hadn't been gone five minutes when Langley opened the door and peered out.

"Is she gone?" gasped Clayburn.

"Yes," returned Langley, closing the door.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Clayburn. "Now we can breathe."

"Yes, breathe, and that is about all. What do you think of ourselves now?"

"A couple of kittens."

"That's it. A pair of kittens. Well?"

"There is nothing left us now but humbly submit," rejoined Clayburn, dolefully.

"What, and do her dirty work for her?" ejaculated Langley, with contemptuous tone.

"What else can we do?"

"Resist."

"That is exactly what you said before, and as soon as you got in her presence you wilted."

"I know it, and would probably do the same thing again; but I propose to make it a point not to get into her power—that is, into her company—again. I find that I am as weak in her presence as you are."

"As I am?"

"Yes."

"Well, when it comes to that," snarled Clayburn, "you were the first to cry quarter to-night."

"True enough," admitted the other, good-naturedly. "Well, we'll say weaker than you, if that is any better. I'm a coward in that woman's presence, although you know that I fear no man that lives, Bob Clayburn."

"That is true, you do not. I cannot understand it."

"No more can I."

The two men were silent for some moments, each apparently busy with his own thoughts.

"So you think you will defy her this time, do you?" remarked Clayburn at length.

"Eh?"

Langley had evidently been so deeply absorbed in reverie that he had forgotten the very existence of his companion.

And he jumped when the latter spoke to him as though he had been shot at.

"I say you intend to carry out your threat of defying her and not going there to-morrow night, do you?" repeated Clayburn.

"I certainly do," replied Langley vehemently. "Henceforth I am a man, even if I have to run away from that woman in order to be one. Do you know what I was dreaming?"

"Were you asleep?"

"Not exactly. A fellow doesn't have to be asleep to dream always. I was dreaming—with my eyes open, of course—that she had compelled us to murder each other, and that we were on the point of doing it, and that she had compelled us to do it by threatening to have some one else kill us if we refused to do it. Just think of the absurdity of the thing. It's as bad as the Japan-

ese compelling a man to commit suicide by threatening to kill him."

"And yet that is about our case."

"Exactly our case. She can do nothing to us that will be of equal injury as what she desires us to do will be to us. No, sir, I will not go. You may do as you please, but I absolutely will not go and do her dirty work."

"Neither will I. If you stick to that resolution I will stick to you."

"Give me your hand on that, old fellow!" cried Langley enthusiastically.

The two men shook hands, and a few minutes later put out the light and left the room.

Thad did not follow them, for his long watch, standing upon his feet all the time, had about done him up in his weak condition.

He therefore returned to his friend's room, where he found his friend sleeping soundly upon one lounge, so the detective threw himself down upon the other and was soon unconscious of all that went on, although even in his dreams he was following some one who ever eluded his grasp.

He was awake early the next morning, and made his way at once toward his rooms on Thirteenth street, where he had a bath and made his toilet.

Thad found that his wounds were much improved, nearly all the swelling having disappeared, and after dressing himself in a neat suit, he went out to breakfast.

By the time he reached the restaurant it was after nine o'clock, and the people who were breakfasting at that hour were naturally of the better class.

Thad sat at the table reading his morning paper and occasionally glancing about at the faces of those who came and went.

All at once he was surprised to see a person whom he recognized come and sit at the same table with him.

It was none other than Miss St. Cloud!

The detective managed to screen his face with his paper for some time, as he did not desire that she should recognize him until after she should order her meal, lest she might get up and leave on discovering that he was there.

She certainly would, he thought, if she knew that he had been a witness to what had passed between her and the two men the previous night.

At length, when she had ordered her meal, he allowed his paper to sink so that she could not fail to see his face, but made no sign of recognition, nor even glanced in her direction.

It was not many seconds before she glanced across the table, and he could see that she started violently when she recognized who sat in front of her.

He still showed no indication of having discovered that she was there and waited for her to speak, which she soon did.

"Why, Mr. Burr!" she exclaimed. "You here? I thought you were out in New Jersey."

"Miss St. Cloud, I believe," observed the detective politely but formally, looking up and smiling and bowing.

"Yes," she replied. "You recognize me, of course?"

"I do since you spoke. But really I should have allowed you to go without recognizing you. I'm so awfully absent-minded that way. Yes, I was compelled to run in for a day. What brings you here, Miss St. Cloud?"

"Oh, I just ran in to do a little shopping to-day."

"You did not come in this morning?"

"Oh, dear no. I came in yesterday afternoon and stopped in the city with friends last night."

So far her story appeared to be pretty straight, but Thad thought he would catch her with his next question.

"You went to the theater, of course?"

"Yes," she replied frankly without a quaver, "and went up on the roof-garden afterward."

"Of the Casino?"

"No, the Madison Square Garden."

This Thad was positive was a lie, for he had met her at a little after eleven not more than two blocks from the Garden and she was dressed in a heavy black dress, a costume that no lady would wear to the opera on a summer evening, unless it was the only dress she possessed, and he noticed that she wore a light silk at the present moment.

He decided to venture a little further.

"I was almost certain that I saw you last night about eleven, Miss St. Cloud, but of course it could not have been you, as this lady had on a black dress."

The detective watched her countenance closely when he made this remark, but it was no use. She looked him calmly in the eye as she replied:

"It could not have been I whom you saw, sir, as this is the only dress I have with me, besides I shouldn't think of going to the opera dressed in black."

Thad could hardly believe his senses.

Was it possible that this young and apparently innocent girl was such a hardened culprit as to sit there and look him straight in the face and tell such a bare-faced falsehood?

Moreover, could this soft-spoken girl be the

same as she whom he had seen cowering and wheedling the two men last night?

"Do you remain long in the city?" he resumed after a pause.

"No, sir, I return this afternoon. I have a reception at home, and must be there without fail."

"That is right," observed the detective. "Never disappoint your guests."

But he thought he knew the kind of a reception she was going to hold, and where she was going to hold it, and he wondered whether she wouldn't be disappointed in at least two of her guests whom she expected, and have one whom she did not expect—for he expected to be there himself.

"How is the case coming on, Mr. Burr?" she asked, naively. "Have you made any important discoveries?"

"Oh, yes, miss, several," he replied.

"And what do you think of the guilt or innocence of the doctor now?"

"That I am hardly at liberty to say. I can say this much, however: what I have discovered is not particularly damaging to his case."

"Indeed?" archly.

And now Thad resolved upon a bold stroke.

"I received some very important information from Hopkins, Miss St. Cloud, and might have received more had you not happened in at that moment and spoiled everything. I suspect you gave him a tip, as they say on the race-track, did you not?"

While he was saying this her face gradually assumed an expression of the most profound astonishment that he had ever witnessed on a human countenance.

"I came in?" she finally gasped.

"Certainly. There is no need of trying to deny it, Miss St. Cloud. I saw you, and you saw and recognized me!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

THAD thought he had seen women dissemble, but nothing he had ever witnessed compared with this woman.

Instead of blushing or losing her countenance when he faced her in this matter, she simply became indignant, and denied the assertion in toto, and with such good grace that he was compelled to admit that he might have been mistaken, and apologize for insinuating that she was in the lawyer's office, although he was as positive that she was there as he was at this minute that she was at the table.

"But the picture was so perfect," he explained. "I never saw two people resemble each other so much. Besides, the lady in question evidently knew me, for I heard her speak of the detective."

"Perhaps it was the lady you spoke to me about once before," she suggested, coolly.

"Perhaps. And perhaps the one I met last night was she."

"Possibly."

"You became indignant when I spoke of her on the former occasion, if you remember, Miss St. Cloud."

"So I did. But that was because I had only just heard of there being such a person, and I was informed that she was not what she ought to be."

"I see. You have grown somewhat more used to it now, I presume. By the way, you have met Robert Clayburn, the murdered man's brother, have you not, Miss St. Cloud?"

"A few times only. He has never mingled in society much. He appears always to have been too much engrossed in his studies."

"How long since you saw him last?"

"It has been a long time. Let me see. It must be nearly a year since I last saw him."

All this without a blanch.

Thad was more and more astonished at her depravity every minute, but he was determined to continue.

He believed, clever as she was, she would sooner or later entrap herself with her falsehoods.

"Have you ever met a gentleman named Augustus Langley?" asked the detective.

"Never," was the prompt and unequivocal rejoinder.

"Are you sure?"

"Sure? Why of course I am. Why do you ask?"

"I did not know but you might have met him and forgotten the occurrence."

"That is possible. I might have met him at a party and forgotten his name and very existence. I thought you meant, had I met him often enough to remember him."

"That is virtually what I did mean. You know we are apt to forget those whom we have met several times."

"Yes, when we cease to see them, or they are separated from us for a long time."

"My reason for asking in his case is that he claims to know you," said the detective, in a cold, incisive tone.

"Claims to know me?"

"Yes. And not only that but says he has an engagement with you to-night at 113 West Fiftieth street."

The girl's eyes became very wide open.



"Why, you astonish me, Mr. Burr. This is some cruel joke. I never heard of the person of whom you speak so far as I know, and I am positive that I know no one on West Fiftieth street that I should go there. There is some mistake. He is either mistaken or you have misunderstood him. Who is this person, Mr. Burr?"

"A detective."

"And he claims to have an appointment with me?"

"He does."

"I thank you, sir, and him, that I am not in the habit of accompanying such characters. I had as lief go with a policeman!"

This was what Thad was working for.

He thought if he could make her angry she might forget her acting and exhibit her true self.

But it appeared that he was mistaken.

She was certainly indignant enough, but she never lost her self-possession.

"I am sorry to have offended you, Miss St. Cloud, he pleaded. "But the interview which I chanced to overhear between yourself and the two men whom I have just mentioned was of such a character as to warrant me in asking the questions I have, and more than that, in doubting your word—pardon the rudeness—when you assert that you do not know Langley and have not seen Clayburn for a year. It also warrants me in believing that you and the mysterious woman who is said to bear such a striking resemblance to yourself are one and the same person!"

These words were uttered in a cold, calm voice, but not unkindly; they were more like the admonitions of a father to his daughter whom he knew to have gone wrong than anything else.

But the effect on the young woman was not what the detective had expected and hoped for.

Her indignation first changed to mingled horror and astonishment, and later to fear.

Nor did it appear to be the fear of a guilty person.

It was more like the fright of a child that is about to be punished for some misdemeanor of which it is innocent.

Thad did not know what to make of it.

Moreover, he did not know what to do.

Argue with himself as he would, in the light of his experience and of his knowledge of this woman, he could not for the life of him believe that she was guilty of the very crimes of which he had just accused her.

Up to the time that he had ceased speaking she had never removed her large, wondering eyes from his face, but when he became silent, she allowed her eyes to droop, and the detective saw the big tears start down her cheeks.

She attempted no reply to his accusations, and was silent for some moments.

At length she said, without raising her eyes from the table:

"I can have no conception, of course, Mr. Burr, what your motive is for taking advantage of the acquaintance which I granted you to insult me in this manner. If you are a gentleman you can probably explain. I am unfortunate enough not to have a brother to defend me against the insolence of men like yourself, else I would not have been alone at this moment, and I am sure that you would not have been man enough to attempt such a thing had I not been unprotected. Do not imagine, however, that I have no friends, and that this insult will not be avenged!"

With that she arose from the table, and before he could interpose an objection, had swept from the restaurant.

Thad was thunderstruck.

What could it all mean?

Had he made a mistake after all, or was this only another phase of the clever actress's many-sided character? Was this another piece of her inimitable acting?

If it was, Thad thought, she was ahead of anything he had ever run across in all his experience.

But somehow he could not believe it was all acting.

He could not but believe that he had made a horrible blunder, such as he had never made before.

If such was the case it might cause him some trouble.

But half an hour later he put the thought away from him, and with a detective's pessimism, decided that the worst was most likely to be the truth.

But, notwithstanding this decision, he could not resist the temptation of going down to the Jersey City ferry late in the afternoon to watch for the young lady and see whether she really would take the train for home or not.

He was disguised as a dapper young swell with a curled mustache and gold-bowed eye-glasses and sported a nobby cane.

And there he waited, watching every passenger that went across until darkness had fallen upon the city and the lights were gleaming along the streets and like many-colored stars along the docks and piers and still he had seen nothing of the woman he sought.

He felt a pang of genuine disappointment, for all this time he had treasured the hope, in spite of his forced optimism, that the girl was innocent and that he would see her off on the train.

Indeed, at times this impression grew so strong that he was almost inclined to think that the scene he had witnessed the night before was an optical illusion or the result of his fevered brain.

At length he was forced into the conclusion, however, that his worst fears were to be realized and that the girl was really guilty. That he would never see her cross the ferry that night, but would see her at the place of appointment on Fiftieth street.

Having arrived at this conclusion he reluctantly turned his back upon the ferry and started up-town.

He had not gone far, though, before he was gladdened by the very sight he had despaired of witnessing.

It was Miss St. Cloud, and she was accompanied by a large, fine-looking gentleman, who appeared to be very solicitous of her welfare.

They were busily talking as they passed the detective, and he heard his own name frequently mentioned.

"He is not likely to attempt to molest you now," remarked the man, reassuringly, "especially while you are with me. In fact, it would not be well for him to do so."

Thad turned and followed them to hear the conversation.

"But he is as likely to be on the train as not," persisted the girl, who appeared to be nervous and frightened. "So you had better accompany me all the way. You can either take the next train back or stay all night and come back in the morning."

"I do not think it necessary," pleaded the man. "If this fellow is an honest detective and has mistaken you for some one for whom he is looking, he will follow you home anyway, unless you succeeded in convincing him that you are not the one."

"Still, he might be on the train, and if he were to approach now, nervous as I am, I should have a fit of hysterics, I know I should, Cousin Charlie. You had better come."

"Oh, well, if you think there is any danger of that, I will go," returned the man. "Though I'd rather enjoy having a tussle with that chap before we start. I was rather in hopes that he would put in an appearance as we came down."

The girl laughed.

"Would you like to have a fight with him, Cousin Charlie?" she asked.

"Nothing would suit me better," was the rejoinder.

And he looked as though he meant what he said.

"If you really wish it, and think he deserves it, I will procure the city address so that you can call on him."

"You needn't go to the trouble, Dory. I can get it from Byrnes easy enough."

"Do you really intend to call on him?"

"I hope I may die if I don't!"

Here the gate to the ferry-house was thrown open and the crowd began surging through, and as Thad had no desire to cross the river, he allowed his friends (!) to go on, while he turned in the opposite direction and was soon on the elevated train on his way up-town.

The detective realized that he would be compelled to use some strategy in connection with the affair on West Fiftieth street, if anything was to come out of that now, which he began to doubt inasmuch as the men had signified their intention of staying away and the girl had gone home.

However, he felt that it would not do to neglect the matter, as there might be something in it, and so he went up to the street and looked up the number.

He could do no more than shadow the house for some time, which he did for an hour or two without anything resulting from it.

At length he saw a servant come out of the house, who appeared to be a footman.

As soon as Thad got near enough to him he saw that he knew him. He had made the menial's acquaintance while working up a case in a house in which the fellow was at work.

The detective at once made himself known to the footman, took him into his confidence, told him that there was a robbery or something of the kind likely to occur, learned all he could about the family, and wound up by making a strange proposition to the servant.

It was to smuggle him into the house, fit him out with a suit of the servant's clothes, let him make himself up as the menial and take his place for the time being.

After some hesitation and a liberal bribe, the fellow consented, and Thad went into the house. The lackey took the detective into his own room, where the latter donned a suit of the servant's livery and made himself up so well that the servant's best friend would not have known which was which.

The lackey then concealed himself and the detective went on duty in his stead.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A THRILLING EXPERIENCE.

AS soon as Thad was installed in the house as a lackey he learned the following facts:

That the owner and occupant of the house was a retired millionaire named Anthony Maxwell.

That Maxwell was a miser and a heartless tyrant.

That he had driven his wife to her grave by his cruelty and neglect, and that his four children, a son and three daughters, had been compelled to leave home and shift for themselves when mere children, and that he knew or cared nothing about where they were at present, and finally that he was an invalid and kept most of his wealth, consisting largely of gold coin and precious stones, in the room which he occupied continually.

That he had never left this room for a dozen years, and that the only one allowed to enter his room, besides the lackey whom Thad was now impersonating, was a queer little old woman who came twice a week to read to him, and who, everybody expected, would some day fall heir to all his wealth.

Before the detective had been in the house long he was called to attend the old man.

He was surprised at what he saw.

The great house throughout was rather poorly furnished, that is, while the furniture was of good quality or had been, it was old-fashioned and worn out. But the furnishing of the rest of the house was palatial compared with the old man's room.

The floor was covered with an old rag in lieu of a carpet, a few broken chairs and a dilapidated table comprised the furniture, with the exception of what appeared to be a sort of bed-lounge upon which the old man slept.

The occupant of the room looked to be at least eighty years old, was bald, almost fleshless and nearly blind.

He was clad in a tattered dressing-gown and sat propped up in bed.

If Thad had been surprised at these things, he was doubly so at the business for which he had been summoned.

"James," began the old man, as soon as Thad entered the room, "who is down-stairs?"

"Nobody, sir," was the respectful reply.

"Don't lie to me! The housekeeper is there, is she not?" screamed the invalid in a thin, piping voice.

"Oh, yes, sir, she is there."

"I thought so. Who is with her, James?"

"Nobody."

"Don't lie! Her daughter, Katie, is with her."

"True, she is."

"I thought so. Is Mrs. Oliphant with her?"

"No, sir."

"Sure?"

"I am positive, sir."

"Very well. James, if Mrs. Oliphant comes, throw her out! She wants nothing but to rob me of my little money. You know, James, that I have but little—just enough to keep us going by the strictest economy for a few more months, and if she robs me, we will all starve. Is it there, James?"

With that the old man put his long bony hand down, pulled the cover which hung from the bed aside, thus revealing a rough box bound with iron straps.

"Yes, sir, it is there," answered Thad.

"Good! James, when Mrs. Patchin comes—this is her night, isn't it, James?"

The Special had not the least idea who Mrs. Patchin was, but supposed she was the little old woman he had heard about, and had no idea whether this was her night or not; but he took that part of it for granted.

"Yes, sir, I believe this is her night," he replied.

"You believe? Blockhead!" roared the old man. "Don't you know it is her night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, when she comes, let her come to me at once. If any one is with her, let the other person remain below, and you remain in the hall near the door while she is here."

"Yes, sir."

This led the detective to believe that the old fellow was suspicious even of this woman, who was evidently his best, in fact, his only friend. "Very well, you may go, James," pursued the old man, and turned his back upon the detective, who had no more than reached the hall below when Mrs. Patchin was announced.

She was accompanied by a tall, slender old man, and Thad, according to instructions, made him go into the sitting-room while the woman caller went up to see Mr. Maxwell.

This order was met by a good deal of opposition on the part of the old woman and her companion, but Thad was firm, and the tall old man finally took a seat in the unlighted sitting-room while the little old woman flounced up-stairs in a very bad humor, accompanied by the detective.

Thad stopped outside the door, as per instructions, and was astonished to hear the old woman giving the old miser a severe scolding for prohibiting her company to come up.

"What do I come here for?" she demanded,



"Is there any profit to me in coming here night after night and reading to you, and you never so much as give me the price of my car-fare?"

"Well, well, Judy," croaked old Maxwell, with a tenderness Thad did not imagine him capable of, "it will all come out right after awhile. You know I cannot live always, and then—"

"And then what? If you mean to leave me your money, why don't you make a will at once?" she snapped. "You are liable to drop off any time and the property would fall into the hands of the lawyer, and your children will turn up, and then where will I be?"

"Well, well, come to-morrow, and I will have a notary here and we will make out the will. Come, read me the rest of that story about the diamond-hunters."

"After you make out the will."

"No, to-morrow night for that. I will not disappoint you."

The little old woman begged and implored for a long time, but old Maxwell would not yield; so at length she abandoned the siege, with the remark:

"If you fail me to-morrow night I will set Mrs. Oliphant onto you!"

This appeared to alarm the old fellow greatly, for he cried:

"For God's sake don't do that, Judy! I won't fail you—indeed, I will not!"

The little old woman appeared to be satisfied now, for she picked up a book and began to read in a low, droning voice, so much so that Thad could not hear what she was reading.

This continued for at least two hours, but at length stopped.

The little old woman then arose to leave, with renewed reminders that Maxwell must not fail her on the next night.

She then came out of the room and glided softly down-stairs.

The old man at once called Thad to him, to warn him against allowing Mrs. Oliphant to come to him, and the detective was prevented from going down-stairs and ascertaining whether the old woman had left the house or not, a thing he had intended to do.

He had been so deeply interested in the proceedings in Maxwell's room that he had entirely forgotten Miss St. Cloud's intended visit until after the little old woman had gone; then, of a sudden, it occurred to him that possibly the little old woman had something to do with the young lady in question.

But, when the Special went down-stairs, and found that the little old woman and her escort, the tall old man, had gone, he abandoned the idea, and concluded that his original opinion of Miss St. Cloud being an innocent girl was the correct one, and that his visit to the Maxwell house had been for nothing.

It was now nearly midnight, and Thad was on the point of returning his livery to its rightful owner, when it occurred to him that it might be as well to pay another visit to old Maxwell's room before going.

To that end he remounted the stairs, and was soon at the door of the miser's room.

But it was locked.

He concluded that the old fellow had retired, and was about to withdraw, when something occurred to arrest his attention.

The miser's room was on the corner of the house, and outside of his window was a fire-escape balcony.

The hall was in total darkness, and the moon, which was now shining with effulgence, after having been covered by clouds the greater part of the night, shone in at a window at the end of the hall.

As Thad started to leave the door he glanced instinctively toward this window, and as he did so, was certain that he saw a shadow move across the window-ledge.

The Special immediately tiptoed to the window and looked out.

A large tree threw its branches about the window so thickly as to shut off the view, but between the branches and the house Thad distinctly discerned two figures crouching.

There was another window near where the figures crouched opening into old Maxwell's chamber.

The figures were evidently endeavoring to prevent the moonlight from striking them, as it did when they stood erect, and thus throwing their shadow upon the hall window.

Thad then stepped back to the old man's door and, putting his ear down, listened.

He could hear the clink of coin, accompanied by a sort of droning sound as of some one counting.

There was a transom over the door, but it was so thickly curtained that no light could escape.

A happy thought occurred to the spy.

At the opposite end of the hall he had noticed before the lights were put out a step-ladder.

Procuring this he put it up to the window.

With his knife he soon managed to unlock the transom and then quietly cut a hole through the curtaining.

When he had done this, a strange sight met his gaze.

The old man had crawled out of bed and was sitting on the floor beside the box, which he had hauled out, and he was busily engaged in counting his treasure.

Stack after stack of gold pieces of large denomination was piled on the floor beside the box where he had evidently counted it out, and he was still counting them out of the box.

This continued for a long time, and Thad noticed a strange gloating expression on the miser's face as he took up one shining piece after another.

Finally, after a long time he appeared to have exhausted the store of gold; then he took a smaller box from the larger one and unlocking it, opened it.

From this Maxwell lifted, one after another, the greatest number and the largest gems the detective had ever beheld.

Diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, every description of gem, of the purest water! Each one he handled with the care and affection of a beloved thing—more so than he would have handled a human soul.

At this point the detective noticed another thing.

Glancing accidentally toward the window beyond the miser, he saw that a hole had been made in the window-curtain and that two pairs of greedy eyes were at that moment peering in and gloating over the sight.

It was the pair of figures he had seen on the balcony; and while he watched the Special saw the curtain slowly and noiselessly drawn aside and a hand thrust in.

This was quickly followed by a head.

It was that of the tall old man who had accompanied Mrs. Patchin.

The intruder glanced cautiously about, and at the miser, who did not look up from his occupation, so noiseless had been the intruder, and so absorbed with his treasure was Maxwell.

The window was behind the couch and the man was soon within, fully concealed by the couch from old Maxwell's observation.

The miser still did not raise his eyes from the glittering wealth before him.

Two or three noiseless steps brought the intruder to the end of the couch and at the miser's back, when, with a quick movement he sprang upon Maxwell and clutched him by the throat.

The detective leaping from the ladder, burst in the door with one shoulder stroke, bounded into the room and one terrible blow from his fist sent the tall old man reeling to the floor.

But, scarcely had the Special dealt it, when a heavy blow on the head from behind caused him to stagger but fortunately not to fall.

Turning he beheld the little old woman, Mrs. Patchin, armed with a club.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### IN DEADLY PERIL.

WHEN the old woman saw that Thad was prepared to meet her, and that her club was of no value, she threw it down and drew a small but murderous looking revolver.

Before she had time to use the weapon, however, the detective was upon her, and grasping her wrist, wrenched the pistol from her.

This rendered her furious, and with a sudden and unexpected movement, she tore herself away and sprang to the opposite side of the room.

The Special, determined to prevent her escape, sprang after her, at which, she suddenly whipped out a dangerous looking knife and, throwing herself into a corner, defied him to touch her.

The woman's eyes glared like those of an infuriated tigress and every nerve in her frame seemed to tingle with a desire to murder the man who stood before her.

Thad was prepared even for such an emergency, for he drew a revolver—not hers but one of his own, a large and more dangerous-looking one.

"Throw down that knife old woman, or I fire!" was his warning command.

Instead of intimidating her, this only seemed to increase her courage and fire her anger.

"Yes, I'll throw it down," she cried, "when I have buried it in your cowardly heart! I dare you to fire!"

As Thad had no desire to kill her, he saw that his only hope was some sort of strategy; so at once he put away the pistol, with the remark:

"I wouldn't shoot a woman, especially an old woman."

He then stepped over to the other side of the room to see how the tall old man, whom he had knocked down, was getting on.

He found that gentleman sitting up on the floor looking wonderingly about as though he was uncertain as to what had happened.

Thad approached him, when the tall man suddenly sprang to his feet and drew a pistol.

He was not quite quick enough, however, for Thad had his own weapon shoved in the old fellow's face before the latter realized what was going on.

The Special was astonished at the effect this action had upon the old man, who began to tremble violently and dropped the pistol which he held in his hand as though it had been hot.

"Coward!" hissed the old woman so close to Thad's ear as to cause him to start, and turning

he found the old woman with her knife drawn ready to strike.

Another instant she would have plunged it into his back; but now he caught the descending arm in his terrible grip, and the tigress was foiled, for he at once wrested the knife from her. The baffled creature again wrenched herself loose and dashed across the room.

While his attention had been taken up with the woman the tall old man had recovered his pistol, and when Thad turned upon him once more, he found the pistol poked in his face.

This caused the detective to lose his temper, especially as the old woman yelled:—

"Shoot him, Benny! Shoot him!"

So the Special knocked the old man down, and without more ado, clasped the handcuffs on him.

This act apparently frightened the old woman for she made a dash for the window, but the alert Thad caught her just as she was going through it, and the handcuffs were snapped on her almost before she knew. She was then dragged back into the room, and pushing her into a corner the detective ordered her to keep quiet or he would iron her other limbs.

"You would, would you?" she screeched.

And, making a dash at the Special, struck him a terrific blow over the head with her handcuffs!

Then he did lose his temper, and grasping Mrs. Patchin by the arms he attempted to throw her upon the floor.

But he found it no easy undertaking, for she fought like a maniac.

It required all his strength and science to accomplish the feat, but he finally put her down.

In the struggle a strange thing happened; the old woman's wig came off.

This was surprise to the Special, for the hair underneath was a glossy dark-brown—in short, the hair of a young woman!

He scrutinized her face more closely, and discerned what had escaped his notice in the excitement which had preceded—that the woman was "made up."

There could be no doubt about it; it was Miss St. Cloud!

And that solved one mystery.

An idea struck the detective.

Stepping over to where the old man lay groaning from the last thump which Thad had administered, he proceeded to examine him, and soon removed a gray wig and a beard of the same hue—which transformed him into another individual: the Special saw before him none other than Augustus Langley, the so-called detective!

"Aha!" cried Thad, when he had returned to where the young woman sat. "So you did succeed in inducing him to come, after all, didn't you?"

Miss St. Cloud only glared her fury in response.

"The other one was a little firmer, however," pursued Thad, "and kept his neck out of the halter."

"Whom do you mean?" she snarled.

"Robert Clayburn."

"What do you know about that?"

"I know all about it, miss," rejoined the Special, smiling. "I was there when the bargain was made. Heard this man and the other swear twice over that they would not come, that they would not do your bidding any longer, and I am glad to see that the other has kept his pledge and sorry to see that this one hadn't the backbone to do it."

"My God!" gasped the woman.

Thad could not at first understand what had elicited the exclamation. He had inferred, however, that it had something to do with what he had been telling her, but following the direction of her eyes, he saw what it meant.

The old miser, to whom, in the excitement no one had paid any attention, had fallen across his pile of glittering wealth and breathed his last!

Whether it was the excitement and fright at what he had witnessed or the choking he had received from Langley, could not be said; but, he was dead when Thad turned him over on his back; that was evident—stone dead.

And what a sight it was!

Eyes wide open and tongue protruding, no wonder the designing woman was horrified.

"Dead!" exclaimed the disguised Thad, now standing over the body.

"Is your master really dead?" asked the woman.

That was a reminder to the detective that he still wore the livery and make-up of the footman.

Without further ceremony he went to the door and called the footman whose place he had been filling all the evening.

But, it took more than one call to arouse the sleepy servant.

He finally came, however, and Thad explained to him what had happened.

The footman alarmed the rest of the inmates of the house, and a doctor and policeman were sent for.

"Then, leaving James in charge of the prisoners, Thad went below and removed his make-up and returned to the room his own natural self.



The moment the woman caught sight of him she exclaimed:

"Detective Burr, as I am a sinner!"

And glancing at the footman, she continued:

"I thought it queer that James should have a twin brother and I had never heard about it. So you are the laddy-buck that put the irons on me are you?"

"That's about the size of it," replied Thad, laughing. "By the way, you didn't go home after all, did you?"

"The woman looked up in surprise.

"What do you mean?"

"That's all right. It won't do to try the innocent dodge on me any longer, Miss Crook. I'm dead on to you. What did you do with Cousin Charlie?"

"You astonish me, sir. You do for a fact. I do not understand a word you are talking about."

"Well, you are a good one! You didn't think that I was within a foot of you when your big cousin pledged you his word that he would come round and do me up first thing in the morning, did you?"

"I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about. I have no Cousin Charlie, and if I had, neither he nor anybody else ever gave me a pledge that he would do you up."

Thad had to catch his breath.

"You do not remember of meeting me in a restaurant on Broadway yesterday morning, I presume?"

"If I did I did not recognize you. The fact is, I was in no restaurant on Broadway at all," decisively spoken.

Thad laughed.

"Well, Miss St. Cloud, I have met liars and liars, but you simply carry off the prize. I'll match you against the Prince of Liars!"

The woman laughed as though she considered it an excellent joke.

"You do not appear to be as sensitive as you were yesterday," continued Thad.

"Not quite," she observed, rising to her feet and yawning. "I wish that policeman would hurry."

"What for?" asked the detective, curiously.

"Because I am anxious to get to a cell where I can lie down and rest. I am very tired. What's the matter with Gussy?"

Thad turned to look at Langley, when, quicker than lightning, the woman slipped the handcuffs from her wrists as though they had been strands of yarn and running to the window, jumped out!

## CHAPTER XIX. AN EXCITING CHASE.

THAD bounded to the window and looked out.

The moon was still shining brightly on that side of the house, but he could see nothing of the woman.

She must have gone down the fire-escape ladder, he thought, and lost no time in descending the ladder himself; but, when he reached the ground she was nowhere to be seen!

He looked in every direction with the same result.

There was but a small yard in the rear, inclosed with a high wall, over which she could escape only with the assistance of a ladder; but ladder there was none; so she had not escaped in that manner.

Indeed, he did not believe, now, that she had come down the fire-escape ladder.

But, where had she gone?

Could she have gone into the hall through the win low?

Thad remounted the ladder, and examined the premises.

He saw at once that the woman could not have reached the window from the balcony.

Where had she gone then?

Perhaps she had entered the house by way of the basement.

Again he descended the ladder and examined the basement door.

It was securely locked down, so that the woman could not have got in that way.

The detective was perplexed.

He mounted the ladder again, and looked about.

The moon was now just passing behind a cloud, and it would soon be very dark.

If he was to do anything, he would have to do it quickly.

Still, with all his gazing about he could see nothing.

He concluded that she must have got into the house some way, and was about to return to the house to make a search inside, when he was attracted by a rustling among the branches of the tree near the house.

Pausing, he gazed a long time in the direction, but for some time could see nothing.

Finally he saw the twigs moving the least bit, and he listened and watched more closely.

Then the last vestige of the moon disappeared, but with its last failing rays he saw something that astonished him.

From one of the longest and most elastic boughs he saw a woman's form swing down to within a few feet of the ground, and then releasing her hold, drop to the earth.

And the worst of it was, she landed outside of the yard, or rather into an adjoining yard.

The only alternative now was to go to the next house and obtain permission to go into the back yard, and this would give the woman ample time to escape, if she could get outside of the other lot.

However, this was all there was to be done, and the detective lost no time in making his way to the street and ringing the bell of the house next door.

Having explained his mission and obtained permission to visit the rear yard, Thad hastened back to find, as he had half expected, that the bird had flown.

And the strangest thing about it was that the rear gate was locked, and there appeared to be no way of getting out.

This led to the belief that she had got into the house some way, and the family were frightened to death until they had called in a lot of policemen, and had the house searched from cellar to garret.

But all this searching resulted in nothing.

The woman was nowhere to be found.

Thad was disgusted.

He returned to the other house, where he found the police had arrived during his absence, and taken Langley in charge.

So now that he had nothing further to do there, he started down-town, with the view to returning to his room.

Before leaving the house, however, he took the precaution to make himself up as he had been when he first came, as a dapper young man with a mustache, etc.

This done he proceeded to the Elevated station and took the train for down-town.

Alighting at Fourteenth street, he was about to start for his rooms, when he noticed a woman coming off the very train he had just left.

She was muffled up in a great cloak so that he could not see her face or even tell anything about what kind of a figure she had, but there was something in her walk that made him think he had seen her before, besides the fact of her coming down at that time of night was enough to arouse his suspicions that something was wrong.

She came down the steps in a brisk walk, but accidentally noticing that Thad was watching her she slowed her pace and began to limp painfully.

This was so palpably a blind that the detective was sure that he had discovered a fly-by-night of some kind.

Approaching her in a deferential manner, Thad asked:

"Old lady, can I be of any assistance to you in helping you home?"

"No, I thank you, sir," came the answer in a thin, quavering voice which Thad knew at once was assumed.

"What appears to be the trouble?" he asked.

"Rheumatiz," she replied.

"That is too bad. You had better let me help you home."

"No, I thank you, young man. I prefer to go alone to having strangers help me."

"But you are very lame," Thad persisted.

"Young man, I shall be compelled to call a policeman unless you cease to annoy me!" she snapped, in a sterner voice.

Thad bowed and left her.

But not entirely.

He kept her in sight.

She turned toward Broadway and when she reached that street turned up-town.

She kept on up the street until she came to Twenty-third street, and then turned east, and continued in this direction as far as Fourth avenue.

"Can it be," mused Thad, "that she is going to Langley's place on Twenty-fourth street?"

Her actions answered the question in the affirmative, for she no sooner reached Fourth avenue than she turned up that street to Twenty-fourth and there turned east again and continued to the middle of the block, stopped at the identical house where he had overheard the plot to murder old Maxwell the night before, and rung the bell.

But unlike the evening before, she was not admitted.

"There can no longer be any doubt it being Miss St. Cloud," mused the detective. "But what brings her here, I wonder? She certainly knows that Langley not being here she cannot get in at this time of night. Perhaps she thinks that Clayburn is here."

Meanwhile the veiled woman, whoever she was, repeated her ring, not once, but half a dozen times, but still received no answer.

Finally she appeared to despair of getting in, and turned slowly and apparently reluctantly away, and started up the street again.

Slowly she sauntered along as if undecided which way to go.

Every little while she would stop and look about her as though expecting some one.

At length she reached Union Square and walking half-way across it, sat down upon one of the seats.

Here she remained for a long time, and Thad was debating with himself whether he would not go up and arrest her on a venture, when suddenly an old man came briskly along

and was about to pass her when she accosted him.

Thad did not imagine that she knew him, from his actions at first, for he turned rather coldly toward her, and for some moments stood conversing with her as though he would rather go his way, but finally the two departed together, going toward Broadway.

As soon as they reached Broadway the old man called a cab and the couple got in and drove off.

They did not leave the detective far behind, however, for he too jumped into a cab and drove after them.

They went up Broadway at a lively gait, but Thad was at their heels.

At Forty-second street they turned west and stopped in the middle of the block between Seventh and Eighth avenues, where they both got out and entered a house.

Thad knew the occupant of this house to be a well-known physician, and wondered what the couple could want in there, unless, perhaps, the woman was a friend of the doctor.

If this were the case the chances were that she would remain all night.

At all events, he could do nothing without a warrant, so calling the patrolman of the beat and, after making himself known to him, telling him what was in the wind and asking him to keep an eye on the house and see who came out, he hastened away to the nearest police justice, roused him up and got a warrant for the arrest of Doretha St. Cloud.

Armed with this instrument, the detective hastened back to where he had left the policeman watching the house.

The latter had seen no one come out who answered the description Thad had given.

The only persons leaving the house were a tall young man and a fat old one.

Thad at once called at the house and demanded the woman.

No such person was there or had been there.

"But a man and woman came in here half an hour ago," insisted Thad.

"Yes, the doctor and his wife came in," replied the attendant.

"I will have to search the house," declared the detective. "I have a warrant for this person's arrest, and have a right to search the premises."

He was admitted and proceeded to search the house from top to bottom, but no one answering the description of the woman he had met was to be found.

Finally when he had exhausted his research he called the doctor into his office and cross-questioned him.

"Do you mean to tell me, doctor," he began, "that a man and a woman—an old man, well-dressed and respectable-looking—and the woman heavily veiled, did not come in here from half to three quarters of an hour ago?"

"Oh, since you put it like that, I remember that there was such a couple. It was one of the funniest things that ever happened to me. The man said his wife was sick and that he wanted to put her under treatment, and that they wanted a room—we have rooms for patients, you know—and I had them shown to a room. They went up-stairs, and five minutes later I heard some person coming down-stairs and, wondering who it could be, looked out into the hall, when to my astonishment, I saw two strange men—one a tall young man and the other a heavy-set old fellow—coming down. I did not inquire who they were or what they wanted, as I supposed they had been up to look at a room, and they went out."

"Well, about two minutes later the chambermaid came down and said that the man and his wife had gone and left a lot of clothes, mostly female apparel, on the floor. My opinion is that the woman that came in was the man that went out."

"I guess you are right in your conclusion," observed Thad dryly, "but I would have thanked you if you had told me that before I wasted all this time in searching the house. You certainly could not have forgotten so remarkable a case as the one you have just mentioned, and when I came with a warrant to arrest a person it strikes me that you ought to have suspected that these were the people I was after."

The doctor became greatly agitated.

He attempted to give an excuse for his conduct, but the more he tried to explain the worse he made his case.

Finally Thad became disgusted and left him, with the remark:

"It may turn out, doctor, that these people are friends of yours. I hope not, but it may turn out that way. I would dislike very much to have to come up here and take you down to the Tombs. Good-night."

The doctor became very indignant, or pretended to.

Thad had no idea which way the fugitives had gone, and it would have been worse than folly to try to follow them now, so he started for his lodgings on Thirteenth street.

It was not far from morning by this time, and the detective had been on the go so long that he felt hungry, so he stepped into a restaurant to get something to eat.



Before sitting down to the table he went to the lavatory and made a radical change in his disguise by adding a full beard.

He had scarcely got seated at the table when two men came in and sat at the next table, one a tall and the other a short, stout one.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A SAD DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE new-comer sat at a table just opposite the detective, so that he had an excellent opportunity of seeing their faces.

They both wore full beards which Thad could readily discern with his experienced eye were false.

In addition, they had heavy eyebrows stuck on, which were calculated to shade the eyes in such a manner that no one could recognize the owner, and in the case of the short, stout man, Thad was pretty well satisfied that his nose was false, for it was too large and too much puffed to correspond with the rest of his face.

The men appeared to feel perfectly secure in their disguise, as they talked and laughed and took no pains to conceal themselves.

Thad appeared to take no notice of them but at the same time took note of all their actions as well as everything they said.

It was not long before he was satisfied that the short man was none other than Miss St. Cloud, but he could not make out who the tall man was.

He would have been inclined to think it was Langley from the voice had he not known that Langley was at that moment locked up.

Thad went on with his meal, still listening to what they had to say but was disappointed that nothing passed between them to either identify the tall man or to positively identify the other as Miss St. Cloud.

However, they said enough to satisfy him on the latter point, and he determined upon a bold stroke.

He allowed the men to finish their meal, and he finished his, and then just as they arose from the table he also arose, pretending to be slightly intoxicated.

Approaching the desk while they were paying their bills, he staggered up against the short man with such force as to nearly knock him off his feet.

To the detective's disappointment, the short man took no offense at the insult, and Thad attempted to make it worse by a profuse but intentionally offensive apology.

But it was of no use.

The short man would do nothing but grin through his big whiskers, and would not even speak.

Seeing that that would not do, the detective began to abuse the little fellow and tell him that he could lick two of him.

This was equally futile, and now the tall man came up and called the short man away, saying that they must go.

This furnished an excuse for him to pick a quarrel out of the tall man, which he accordingly proceeded to do.

The tall man was equally non-combative, but Thad pushed matters to such a degree that he finally struck the detective.

That was sufficient.

Thad made one snatch at the tall man and brought away his whiskers and eyebrows.

As soon as he did this, he recognized his man. It was Langley!

How had he escaped the police, Thad wondered?

However, he did not stand for any more discussion, but took to his heels.

And as soon as he lit out the fat man attempted to follow him, but Thad was a little quicker for him, and caught him as he went out the door.

The short man fought frantically, but Thad held on to him and in the scuffle managed to divest him of his big whiskers.

Still clinging to him, the detective pulled off the false nose and shaggy eyebrows.

Then he took a good look at the fellow's face. It was Martin Hopkins, the slyster lawyer!

Thad was disappointed beyond measure.

He had expected to find Miss St. Cloud.

By this time a crowd had gathered about and among them two or three policemen.

But as the fellow had been shown to be in disguise, Thad was justified in what he did, especially as he thought he had been shadowing a woman for whom he held a warrant.

However, there was no warrant against Hopkins, and as he explained that he and his companion had been to a masked ball and had retained their disguises to fool some friends, the policemen were inclined to let him go, until Thad told his story about the intended robbery and murder in which Hopkins's companion had been engaged and for which he had been arrested and escaped, and then the police took the fat man in.

Thinking it barely possible that Langley might return to his room on Twenty-fourth street, Thad made haste to repair thither, and arrived at the place just as daylight was breaking.

Everything was quiet about the place at this hour.

Not a soul was to be seen on the street except an occasional milkman, and the detective found it rather gloomy and lonesome waiting around in hope of seeing some one coming in or going out.

He did not at first deem it worth while to ring the bell, as Langley would hardly respond to it under the circumstances, but after a little thought he came to the conclusion that that was the better way, for the reason that Langley having left his companion behind, he would naturally imagine that it was he ringing the bell. Besides Thad knew in reason that Hopkins would be likely to come here in case of making his escape, as he had seen him here trying to obtain admission earlier in the evening.

Thad therefore rung the bell.

He did it in a soft, timid sort of way, like one who is afraid of being detected.

It was the old-fashioned kind of bell with a handle instead of an electric button, and the amount of noise it made depended upon the vigor with which you jerked the handle.

The device had the desired effect, and two or three minutes later Thad heard footsteps descending the stairs.

An idea occurred to the detective on the spur of the moment.

If Langley recognized him, which he probably would do in his present disguise, he would not admit Thad, but shut the door in his face as soon as he saw him.

Thad had put the gray beard which he had snatched from the fat man's face into his pocket.

It was but the work of an instant to remove the beard on his own face and replace it with the gray one, and when the door opened, which it did a moment later, the opener was confronted by what appeared to be a venerable old man with a full gray beard.

The door was opened cautiously at first, just enough to allow the person inside to peep out, but the sight that met him was evidently satisfactory, for an instant later the door was opened wide enough to admit a man's body and the person inside whispered:

"Come in."

Without a word, Thad glided inside and the other closed the door quickly.

Fortunately it was very dark in the hall, otherwise the person who had opened the door must have recognized the detective from his height, which was at least a head more than that of the fat lawyer.

"I was afraid," observed the man, as he led the way up-stairs, "that that detective had captured you."

Imitating the voice of the fat man as nearly as possible, the detective replied:

"He did come mighty near it, but I gave him the slip and made my escape."

"Well, it's lucky for us," continued the other. "For if he had caught you, although there is nothing against you, it would have led to my arrest sooner or later."

"How's that?"

"Why, you see, he didn't recognize me, I'm confident, I got away so quickly, but if he had caught you, the chances are he would have compelled you to tell who your companion was."

All this had been said in a whisper, and it was impossible for the detective to recognize the voice positively.

He believed the speaker to be Langley from the nature of his conversation, still, there was nothing absolutely certain about that.

He felt that he might be mistaken in the man whom he had unmasked being Langley, just as he had been mistaken about the woman he had followed being Miss St. Cloud.

Therefore Thad decided to wait till they got into the room so that he could be absolutely certain of his man before making an arrest.

By this time they had reached the top of the house where Langley's room was located, and the person who had led the way opened the door.

He did not admit the detective at once, however, but closing the door after getting inside himself, he remarked:

"Just wait there a moment."

And then to Thad's surprise and chagrin the fellow closed the door and locked it.

He was at a loss to understand the meaning of it at the moment, but what he heard from the inside a moment later led him to guess that the fellow was not altogether satisfied about the detective's identity to allow him to enter at once.

What he heard inside was a discussion between the person who had just gone in and some one who, judging from the voice, was a female, although it appeared that she was either disguising her voice intentionally or was afflicted with a very bad cold.

He could not hear what they were talking about exactly, although he heard his name repeated several times, which led the detective to believe that one or the other of the two inside suspected who he was.

This controversy continued so long and waxed so hot that Thad was almost in despair of its coming to an end, and decided upon another way of discovering whether the parties inside were the people he suspected they were.

He remembered the vacant room next to that

of Langley, and he glided softly along the hall till he came to the room in question and tried the door.

Luckily it was unlocked, not having been fastened since he was in there on the previous night.

Opening the door softly, the detective went in and was soon before the peep-hole in the wall, from which he had an excellent view of the interior of the other room.

The day had now advanced sufficiently so that the light from the outside shone in the windows of Langley's room, so that every object was plainly visible.

The woman, clad in a dark traveling dress, stood near the window so that the light fell full in her face.

The detective had no trouble about recognizing her.

It was Miss St. Cloud.

And the man, who stood near her, was Langley beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Being fully satisfied on this point, and having a warrant for the woman in his pocket, the detective's course was plain.

He would go down on the street and procure the assistance of a policeman and come back and arrest the pair, one on the warrant and the other as an escaped prisoner.

To this end he started through the hall again on tiptoe.

But his movements had not been unheard, it appeared.

For just as he arrived opposite the door of Langley's room, the door suddenly flew open and two pairs of hands, each holding two pistols were thrust out into the detective's face.

"Not just yet!" came the caustic voice of Miss St. Cloud. "We know you, and don't propose to let you go so soon!"

Thad jumped back and attempted to draw his own revolver, but the stentorian voice of Langley, which was full of earnestness, deterred him.

"Up with your hands!" commanded the fellow.

Thad saw that discretion was the better part of valor, and quietly complied.

"Disarm him," commanded Langley, evidently addressing his female companion.

She lowered her weapon and took a step forward, for the evident purpose of carrying out the order, when Thad executed a very clever piece of strategy.

The instant the woman was directly in front of him, he squatted so as to put himself completely behind her, or rather to use her as a shield against Langley's bullets, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, he snatched both pistols from the woman, thrust her aside, and before Langley realized what had occurred, had the weapons leveled upon him.

The latter saw that the game was up, and dodged back into the room, where the woman had already ran, and shut the door in the detective's face.

It was quick work all round, and not more than ten seconds had elapsed during the whole performance.

There was but one thing left the detective now, and that was to carry out his original plan, and accordingly he hurried down to the street in search of a policeman.

One was soon found, and they returned to the room and burst in the door—only to find that the birds had flown.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS.

HAVING failed to capture his game, Thad decided to change his tactics.

He saw that he had to deal with two very cunning criminals, and that it would require a good deal of keen detective work to bag them, if he did at all.

He knew that so long as he was pursuing them they would flee, whereas, if they thought he had abandoned the chase they would grow careless and possibly fall into his net when least expected.

There was one thing certain, Miss St. Cloud could not very well remain away from home much longer without accounting for her absence, otherwise she would arouse suspicion as to her conduct.

Besides she must know that the detective, having failed to catch her in the city would be likely to go back to the village and in all probability tell somebody about her conduct in the city, which would soon spread over the village and blast her reputation.

Having thoroughly considered these matters, the detective decided to return to Plainfield and prosecute his work from that point.

He therefore returned to his apartments on Thirteenth street to make preparations for the journey.

When he reached his house it was about eight o'clock, and by the time he got dressed and prepared for his journey it was in the neighborhood of nine o'clock.

Thad was just about to leave his apartments when there came a rap at his door.

On opening the door Thad was somewhat surprised and disconcerted to meet the big man who had accompanied Miss St. Cloud to the depot at Jersey City, and whom she had called Cousin Charlie.



The detective knew him at a glance, but he affected not to do so, and addressing the man politely, asked him what he could do for him.

"Have I the honor of speaking to Detective Burr?" asked the man, in a cold, practical tone.

"You have," rejoined Thad, quietly.

"My name is Charles Summers," explained the big man, "and I desire to speak to you about a little matter."

"Very well," said Thad. "Come inside."

When the man got inside he continued:

"The matter about which I wish to speak is touching a young lady, a relative of mine—Miss Doretha St. Cloud. You doubtless remember the lady."

"I do," replied the detective.

"Well, it appears that you have mistaken her for some one else for whom you are looking, and that after she had repeatedly assured you of your mistake, you persisted in claiming that she was the veritable criminal. The young lady was so nervous and agitated over the matter, that we had great trouble to prevent her from going into hysterics last night. Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Simply that you, and not I, are mistaken in this matter," replied the detective coldly.

"Then you still persist in believing, or pretending to believe, that my cousin is the criminal?"

"I wish, sir, for your sake, as well as her own, that it only amounted to belief. I know she is the one."

The big man grew livid with rage.

He was too angry to reply at once, but Thad could see that he was making a desperate effort at calmness.

"If my proofs were not indisputable, Mr. Summers," pursued Thad, "I might be inclined to doubt the fact. It is hard to reconcile what I have witnessed of the conduct of this young woman with her appearance and address as I have witnessed them on other occasions."

The man arose from his seat, clinched his fists, bit his lip and appeared on the verge of an outburst of temper, but succeeded in controlling himself, and simply said:

"Go on."

"When I first met her," pursued the detective, "I was impressed not only with her beauty and grace, but with her good sense and apparent nobleness of character. But before the next twenty-four hours I had occasion to doubt the latter and to feel that I had met the most finished actress and thorough adept in treachery and finesse I had ever encountered."

"But let us come down to night before last—"

"Hold!" cried Summers. "I was with my cousin night before last, and know where she was and what she did. However," he continued, calming down again and speaking in a milder tone, "let me hear your version of the story. Where was my cousin night before last?"

"First allow me to ask you whether you were in her society all the evening or not."

"Well, not quite. We went to the concert and she left us about eleven o'clock—"

"And went in the direction of Fourth avenue on Twenty-fourth street, didn't she?" interrupted the detective.

The man turned pale.

"By Jove! she did!" he gasped.

"That is what I thought," replied the detective coolly. "After she left you, you do not know what she did, do you?"

"I am sorry to say that I do not," admitted the big man bitterly.

"And I do. She was in the society of two of as vile criminals as New York can boast of."

"You jest."

"I wish I did or could under the circumstances. If I had not seen it with my own eyes, I should be inclined to doubt the truth of it. If I had not heard her plot a cold-blooded murder and robbery and compel these two men against their will, vicious as they are, to assist her in the execution of the foul crime, I would believe the evidence of no man living."

"The plan was to murder an old man, who has been bed-ridden for years, for his money, last night."

"In the afternoon, as she told you, I met her in the restaurant on Broadway, and as she probably also told you, I mentioned something about what I had heard and seen. Of course she denied everything, even that she was acquainted with the parties in whose company I had seen her. I did not tell her what I thought of her veracity."

"She told me that she was going home in the afternoon, and doubting this statement, in view of her other stories, I disguised myself and watched for her at the ferry. I saw that she actually did go in company with yourself, and heard your threat to come round and do me up. I really believed then that she had gone home—"

"So she did, sir. I accompanied her," interposed the big man.

"I do not doubt your word, sir. As I said, I believed she had gone home, and that either I had made a mistake in supposing that I had heard the plot, or that she, having made it, had abandoned it. So when I called at the house where the crime was to be committed, it was with a feeling that I should not see the young lady there."

"But so much for human hopes. When the time came, she was on hand with one of the men, and attempted to murder the poor old man, and, while they did not exactly kill him outright, the agitation they caused him, resulted in his death."

"My God! Can this be true?" exclaimed the big man, the perspiration standing out on his brow in great beads.

"As true as I live, sir."

"This is terrible. And yet she appears to be so innocent."

"That is the mystery. Well, I arrested the pair and got the handcuffs on them, but while I was looking after the man she slipped the irons off her wrists and made her escape. Leaving a policeman in charge of him, I put off after her, but she gave me the slip."

"On my way home I thought I had run across her in disguise, but it turned out that it was some one else. I afterward found her, however, in her companion in crime's room, and again tried to arrest them, but they gave me the slip, and I have seen nothing of them since."

The man was silent for some moments after the conclusion of the detective's story, and sat with his face buried in his hands.

At length he raised his eyes and looked Thad straight in the face for a full minute.

Then he rose to his feet and put out his hand.

"You have broken my heart, sir, but I cannot help but believe all you have said. You do not speak like a man who could or would slander a woman, but what you have told me has broken my heart. She is the only woman I ever loved, and I hoped some day to make her my wife. But all that is passed. It can never be. Good-by, sir. I came up here to lick you, but I go away feeling that I should bless you for saving me from the fate of marrying such a woman. Good-by."

"Good-by," said Thad, grasping his hand warmly.

And the man was gone.

The interview had consumed so much time that it was now approaching noon, and Thad remembered that he had eaten nothing all day.

So he hurried out, carpet-bag in hand to the nearest restaurant to procure some breakfast.

After partaking of a substantial meal, he looked at his watch and saw that he would be just in time for a train going to Plainfield, if he lost no time.

He hastened away to the depot, and half an hour or so later was whirling away toward the pleasant little New Jersey village.

The first place he stopped was at the office of Dr. Mortimer.

That gentleman was delighted to see him.

"How is the case coming on?" asked the doctor, almost the first thing.

"Not as well as I could wish," rejoined the detective, rather despondently. "I have made a good many discoveries, but I have not run anything home yet."

"Without wishing to be inquisitive," said the doctor, "I would like to ask whether your discoveries in the case of Miss St. Cloud have borne out my theory in regard to her."

"I believe I may rely upon your secrecy," observed Thad.

"You can, sir. Anything you tell me in confidence I pledge you my honor never to reveal to mortal."

"I believe you, doctor. Well, my discoveries in regard to Miss St. Cloud only bear out your theory, but show her to be one of the most accomplished female criminals it ever fell to my lot to encounter. She is not only a murderer at heart, if not in reality, but she is a thief and an adept in all the wiles of the professional crook."

"You astonish me!" ejaculated the doctor, whose eyes had been increasing in size from the beginning of the detective's account. "More than that I cannot believe it. I believed she murdered Clayburn, because she had been greatly, cruelly wronged by him. But to tell me that she would deliberately and without provocation commit so heinous a crime, is to assert something that I cannot believe."

"Neither could I if I had not seen it with my own eyes, doctor."

Thad then proceeded to tell him the whole story of the young lady from the moment when he snatched her veil off her face to the attempt to arrest her.

At its conclusion the doctor looked like a man who had received a heavy blow that had stunned him.

He was unable to speak for a long time.

When he finally recovered his speech, he said:

"Either there is some terrible, horrible mistake or you are telling the truth. It is impossible for me to dispute what you have told me, although I would rather you had shot me dead than to have done it. She is the only woman I ever loved, and I hoped some day, in spite of the fact of her one sin, which was the result of her weakness, and her crime for which I do not blame her, to have made her my wife. But that can never be now. I will never see her again. And what is more, I do not care whether you go on with the case or not. I do not care whether the world thinks me guilty or not."

"Oh, you should not take the matter so seri-

ously, old fellow. It may turn out to be a mistake, although it does not look possible that it could now. By the way, have you seen anything of her lately?"

"Yes, I saw her to-day. She had just returned from New York, I understand, although I did not speak to her."

"Do you know whether she returned from New York on night before last or not?"

"Yes, she did. I happened to be on the street, and saw her in company with her cousin."

"Do you know whether she returned to the city that same night or not?"

"That, I do not know. However, I can find out. My servant girl has a sister working for the St. Clouds, and if I am not mistaken, she staid all night with her sister on that very night. I will see."

With that he left the office and went back to his residence, where he lived with his mother and sister.

In a few minutes he returned.

"My girl was, as I thought, over there night before last, and she says that Miss St. Cloud went somewhere and remained over night, but that nobody in the house knew where she went."

"That is the last link that welds her chain of guilt," said Thad.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### REGAINING LOST GROUND.

ALTHOUGH Thad gave utterance to the last sentence with the full conviction that he believed it, as a matter-of-fact, it was more a question of apprehension than belief.

In reality, if he had examined his own heart, in spite of all he had seen and heard in regard to this woman, he could not conscientiously say that he believed her guilty of the murder of Roger Clayburn.

And as for Mortimer, strongly as he had believed it before, or pretended to believe in the girl's guilt, now that the matter was about to be proven, as it seemed, he was ready to reject the evidence.

Thus do our sympathies control our judgment.

After a long silence, during which the young doctor sat with his face hidden in his hands, he finally raised his head.

"Well, having arrived at this conclusion, Mr. Burr, what are your plans?"

"That, of course, I cannot answer. In the first place, I do not know positively myself, and if I did, it would not be proper for me to reveal them."

"True. I did not think of the impertinence of the question when I asked it. However, if it would not be too much to ask, I should greatly like to know whether you intend putting her under arrest at once. I believe you have a warrant for her?"

"I have. Yes, I see no other way now but to secure her at once. So long as she is at large, she will be up to some deviltry, and perhaps her arrest will bring to light the very thing we desire—the fact of her innocence."

The doctor was silent again for some time.

"May I offer a suggestion, Mr. Burr?" he finally asked.

"With pleasure."

"Don't arrest her just yet. But instead, put a close watch upon her."

"How is this to be accomplished?"

"I will tell you. The girl of whom I spoke who is employed by my mother as a serving maid, as I told you, has a sister employed by the St. Clouds. Miss St. Cloud has taken a great fancy to the girl in our employ and has long desired to procure her as a lady's maid for herself. We have refused to let her go, as she is an excellent girl and we desired to keep her ourselves. But now I will arrange it so that she will be employed by the young lady, and will instruct her to act as spy or detective to watch the young lady's movements and report to us."

"That is an excellent idea. But can this girl be trusted?"

"Implicitly. She is as honest and truthful as the day is long, I would trust her with anything."

"But will not that very quality militate against us to some extent? Will she be willing to play false to her mistress to the extent of becoming a spy?"

"Yes, when she knows the motive."

"Very well. Let me see the girl and give her instructions. But before you bring her to me, explain the matter to her fully, so that she will not be startled by my instructions."

"All right. I will go at once. You remain here, and I will bring her in as soon as I get her coached."

So saying, he left the office and repaired a second time to the house, which stood back of the office.

Thad waited patiently, and in the course of half an hour the doctor returned with a bright-eyed, tow-headed wisp of a girl, not bigger than an ordinary child of seven, although her face showed her to be much older.

The young man introduced her to the detective as Miss Evangeline Crisp, although he ex-



plained that she generally went by the name of "Angy."

She did not appear to be the least timid in the detective's presence, and talked freely.

"Well, Miss Angy," began the detective, "do you understand the nature of the mission upon which you are going?"

"I think I do, sir," she answered, promptly. "It is to watch Miss St. Cloud, and see where she goes and what she does."

"That is correct. But you must know that you will have to use a good deal of strategy to obtain this information. If the young lady is evilly-inclined, she may desire to conceal her movements from even her maid."

"No doubt, sir. But if she is going away any place, no matter where, she will have to make some preparation, and I can easily watch where she goes. Pretend to be asleep, for instance, if she is going away at night, and then when she starts, follow her and see where she goes."

"Why, my girl," cried Thad, in surprise, "you are a born detective. Did you ever steal anything in your life?"

The child looked horrified.

"Never!" she averred, stoutly.

"If you are a detective you will sometimes even be compelled to steal."

"Then I do not want to be a detective."

"But circumstances alter cases. If it becomes necessary to take an object which in reality does not belong to the party whom you are watching, and which may be used as evidence against that party, then it ceases to be theft. Don't you think you could do it under those circumstances?"

"I might, sir," replied the girl, with a cunning little grin.

"I think so," observed Thad, in a kindly voice. "Now, look here: Miss St. Cloud has in her possession two articles, which it is important that I should have. One is a gold medal, which was presented by Yale College to Mr. Roger Clayburn—"

"The man who was killed?" she interposed, casting a horrified glance toward Mortimer.

"Yes," rejoined Thad. "The medal is inscribed with his name and the name of the college. I want you to procure that, if possible, and also a letter which was written by her to Martin Hopkins, which, if she has not destroyed it, is also in her possession. You may have some difficulty in getting possession of the letter, but the medal you may procure by going through her drawers and boxes in her absence. Here are some keys," continued the detective, handing the girl a bunch of keys, "which will fit any lock ever made."

The child took the keys and examined them critically for some moments, and finally said:

"It looks as if I was going into the burglar business."

"Very much," laughed the detective. "But we have to get used to such things. Do the best you can, my girl, and you shall be well rewarded. And now, doctor," he pursued, rising, "I will go. I have some other matters to look into. I will call in to-morrow to see whether you have received any report from our little detective."

Thad then took his leave.

He first went to the hotel, and after explaining to the landlord, with whom he was very well acquainted, what he wished to do, so that there would be no mistake, went to the room which he had procured on first coming to the village, and proceeded to make himself up to represent an Italian artist with long hair and bushy mustache and imperial.

When this was accomplished the detective called at the residence of the Clayburns and asked for Robert Clayburn.

Thad was shown into the sitting-room, where he was joined in a little while by not only Robert Clayburn, but Augustus Langley!

He noticed that the latter had several marks on his face and a discolored eye, the result of Thad's treatment on the evening of the attempted murder and robbery of the old miser.

Thad had sent up a card with the name of an Italian artist of some note, and Robert, who was something of a connoisseur of art, greeted him cordially.

After some general conversation on art, Thad came to the object of his visit at once by saying:

"I believe it is the intention of the family to have a portrait of your dead brother painted, Mr. Clayburn, is it not?"

"I believe that is the intention," replied Robert, carelessly. "But I do not know where they are going to get the money for such a thing just now."

"Oh, the expense is not very great," observed the alleged artist. "Besides the fortune you will soon come into will enable you to stand almost any expense."

This remark caused the young man to stare and exchange glances with Langley.

"What fortune do you refer to?" he asked in surprise.

"That of your uncle, the late Anthony Maxwell."

"I do not understand you, sir. In the first place, my uncle is not dead, so far as I know, and if he were, it is not at all likely that he will leave us anything."

"You are not aware of his death?"

"No, sir."

"Has not your friend here informed you?" he asked, glancing at Langley.

That gentleman turned ashen and became greatly agitated.

"I know nothing about the affair," averred Langley, stoutly.

But his face told a different story.

Both young men became silent.

"Mr. Maxwell informed me some time previous to his death," pursued the detective, "that he intended leaving all his wealth to your brother. Later, after your brother had been murdered, the old man decided to bequeath it to your family, but a little old woman who used to read to the old man every night or two, persuaded him to will his property to her. The will was never made, however, and inasmuch as this woman, who was in reality a young woman in disguise, and her lover or paramour, murdered the old man, it is not likely that either of them will get it, in my opinion."

The young men exchanged apprehensive glances, and still remained silent.

"Therefore, under the circumstances, it is only reasonable to believe that your family will get the property, especially as there is a will somewhere to that effect."

"How do you know this?" gasped Robert.

"I saw it."

"Where?"

"In the possession of the little old woman, whose name was supposed to be Mrs. Patchin."

"Where?" inquired the young man eagerly.

"In the room of her friend, No. 16 East Twenty-fourth street."

Robert turned pale.

Again he exchanged glances with Langley.

"Are you sure she has this will?" demanded the young man.

"Perfectly."

Both young men groaned.

"You don't happen to know this little old woman, I presume?"

Both men shook their heads.

"I did not know but you might. I would like to locate her. I have some business in the artistic line with her. I have discovered the name of her lover—two of them, in fact, and—"

"Through whom?" interposed Langley, excitedly.

"Martin Hopkins, who is in jail!"

Both men began to tremble violently.

For some minutes neither of them could speak.

"Perhaps you may know these men who are the young lady's lovers? Their names resemble your own somewhat," continued the detective in the same cool, calm manner.

"What!" exclaimed both men in chorus.

"Clayburn and Langley!"

Expressions of mingled terror and desperation in their faces was the only response.

They seemed paralyzed with these revelations.

Thad affected to notice nothing of their discomfiture.

"And the woman's real name," he went on, "is Doretha St. Cloud!"

Both men sprung to their feet.

Their eyes flashed fire.

The mention of this name appeared to have wrought them up to a state of fury that the exposure of their own characters could not have done.

"That is a lie!" thundered Clayburn. "The lady of whom you speak is above reproach!"

"I wish I could think so," rejoined Thad coolly. "And if I had not personally seen her in the society of two such consummate scoundrels, I might think so. If I had not unmasked her and her paramour, Langley, and put them under arrest, I—"

"Who are you?" cried Langley in a white-heat of passion.

"The footman who put the handcuffs on you in old Anthony Maxwell's bedroom last night!"

"Then he's a detective!" cried the young man, making for the door.

"Hold!" shouted Thad, leveling a revolver on him. "I would like your company back to New York, where I shall start pretty soon."

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### MEETING AN OLD FRIEND.

AT sight of the revolver Langley stopped.

He glanced helplessly at Clayburn, as though expecting assistance from him.

But that young gentleman was too much panic-stricken to come to his aid.

In fact, Robert was, if anything, a little the worst frightened of the two.

He did not know how soon his time would come.

He expected of course that he would be arrested, after what he had heard the detective say about his connection with the woman.

In the meantime Thad had approached the crestfallen Langley, still keeping him covered, with his revolver, and when within a few feet of him said:

"Put out your hands, please."

The culprit tremblingly obeyed.

Thad snapped the irons on his wrists, and then continued:

"I trust you will not get rid of them so easily this time, old fellow, as you did last night. In

fact, I shall see that your friends do not get round. Tell me, who helped you out last night?"

Langley was morose and doggedly refused to answer.

"Never mind," continued Thad. "I think I can guess. It was Mrs. Oliphant—otherwise, Martin Hopkins."

If Thad had told him what he (Langley) was thinking about at that moment, the fellow could not have looked more surprised.

He stared at the detective as though he thought him some supernatural being.

Turning to Clayburn, Thad said:

"Good-day, Mr. Clayburn. I may call for you at another time. At present I have no occasion for your company."

With that he marched his prisoner out of the house.

Before they reached the end of the gravel walk that led to the gate through a shady vista of fine old trees, Thad observed:

"See here, old fellow, you will probably not care to walk through the village streets with irons on your wrists."

Langley looked up at him in grateful surprise.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean," rejoined the detective, "that if you will promise me not to make any attempt to escape—which would only force me to shoot you, and cause more of a scandal than ever—I will remove the handcuffs and you may walk along with me as a companion. As I am in disguise nobody will suspect that I am a detective, and I will therefore never suspect that you are under arrest."

"This is very kind of you, sir," replied Langley in a grateful voice. "I will not only promise to make no attempt to escape, but I will give you some important facts in the case upon which you are engaged."

Thad at once removed the handcuffs.

As they pursued their way, the detective asked:

"What are the facts?"

"One of them is, the present whereabouts of Miss St. Cloud."

Thad looked at him in amazement.

"What do you mean?"

"I say, I will tell you where the young woman is at present concealed," rejoined Langley.

"But she is not concealed."

"What?"

"She is at home in this village."

"Impossible."

"I tell you it is true."

"How long has she been there?" asked Langley with a puzzled expression.

"Since this morning, I believe."

Langley's countenance fell.

"Oh, I thought I was going to give you a pointer. She has had the supreme gall to come home, has she?"

"So it seems."

Langley was silent.

"When and where did you see her last?" asked the detective.

"At a house—182 West 125th street, New York, about eight o'clock this morning."

Without knowing that it was to be of any use to him, Thad took down the address and put it into his pocket.

"She must have made good time to be over here at the time they say she was," he mused.

"Now, about the other points," he went on, turning to the young man.

"They are simply these: Go to the number I have just given you, and make the old woman you will find there give you a small iron box. It contains the will you mentioned awhile ago—"

"Is there really such a will, then?" asked Thad, in surprise.

"Certainly. Did you not know it?"

"No. It was all guess-work on my part. I guessed that there might be such a thing when I heard that the old man was the uncle of the Clayburns, and that the murdered young man was a great favorite of his, and then heard the woman trying to induce him to make out his will in her favor."

"Well, you guessed correctly. There is such a will. You will find it in that box. You will also find some other important papers—which will well-nigh clear up the mystery of the murder."

"You had nothing to do with the murder, of course?" interposed the detective.

"Nothing whatever. I could tell you who did it, however, but I would prefer to have you find that out yourself, which you can easily do from the pointers I have furnished you. I would tell you; but you will find out why I cannot in due time, and then you will not blame me for acting the part that I have."

"Well, old fellow," said Thad, in a kindly voice, "if this turns out as you promise, it will be worth while to you. I will see that you come out all right."

"That is what I expect, and that is what I am doing this for. Whatever I have done, I have been dragged into by an irresistible force which it is impossible for you or anybody else to understand."

"I believe that. I saw something of it the other night. You refer to this woman?"



"Yes."  
 "And has she the same power over Clayburn?"  
 "Precisely."  
 "How is it that he did not assist in the robbery last night?"  
 "There is something curious about that affair. We both fully intended to carry out the resolution you probably heard us make, and lest we should encounter her and again fall under her influence, we started to leave the city. In fact, we did get as far as Jersey City on our way here. We had to wait awhile for a train, as we had missed one, and as I happened to think that I had forgotten to bring any money with me in the hurry of getting away, I took the opportunity of going back to the city to get some, leaving Bob in the depot at Jersey City. Well, I got the money of a friend on Park Row and started for the ferry again when who should I run across but Miss St. Cloud."  
 "What time was this?"  
 "About eight o'clock in the evening."  
 "Who was with her?"  
 "Nobody."  
 "Are you sure?"  
 "Positive. I walked a distance with her."  
 "That is strange," said Thad, half musingly. "I saw her at about the same time, and she was accompanied by her cousin."  
 "Her cousin?" ejaculated Langley, in surprise.  
 "That is a new one on me. What did she claim his name was?"  
 "Charles Summers."  
 "Never heard of him. What kind of a looking man is he?"  
 "Very large, fine-looking man. Something of an athlete, I should say. Came up to do me up this morning, for insulting his cousin."  
 "And did he?"  
 "No. After hearing my story, he went away satisfied."  
 "You didn't apologize, did you?"  
 "Not at all. I told him what I knew about his cousin, and instead of wanting to fight after that, he came to the conclusion that she was about as bad as the law allowed, and said that he was done with her. He also said that he had intended marrying her, but that after what I had told him, the jig was up, notwithstanding the fact that she was the only woman he ever loved."  
 "This is all very strange," remarked Langley. "I have known that woman ever since she was a little girl, and I never knew that she had any such a relative, much less lover."  
 "Perhaps she did not wish to tell you about him, lest you should be jealous. But tell me, Langley, was she or was she not on very intimate terms with Roger Clayburn, the man who was murdered?"  
 "Very."  
 "Is it true that he ruined her?"  
 "I think there is no doubt of that."  
 "Was not Eldridge Mortimer also in love with her?"  
 "I don't know about him being in love with her. She was undoubtedly in love with him," answered Langley, a little bitterly, Thad imagined.  
 "It is probably also true that she tried to save him when he was on trial for the murder of Clayburn, is it not?"  
 "Undoubtedly."  
 "Do you happen to know anything about a letter that she is supposed to have written to Martin Hopkins, in which she confessed the murder, and implored Hopkins to do all in his power to save Mortimer?"  
 "Yes, I know all about that letter."  
 "Is it genuine? Did she write it?"  
 "She certainly did, or dictated it," rejoined Langley, firmly.  
 "If she had anything to do with it, she wrote it."  
 "What makes you think so?"  
 "Because it is in the same hand as her other correspondence."  
 "With whom?"  
 "Roger Clayburn."  
 Langley laughed.  
 "That's good!"  
 "What's the matter?"  
 "She never wrote him a letter in her life."  
 "But I happen to know better."  
 "How do you know it?"  
 "I saw them."  
 "You may have seen letters which were claimed to be hers, but she never wrote them."  
 "Then she never wrote the letter to Martin Hopkins."  
 "That's what I say—she dictated it, but she did not write it."  
 "Why do you think she did not write it?"  
 "I don't think—I know she did not. She can't write a line."  
 "Nonsense!"  
 "True, nevertheless."  
 "How is that?"  
 "The fact is, since you've pumped it out of me, she had a paralytic stroke in her right hand when she was a child and she has never learned to use a pen. She has a splendid education with that exception. But she never learned to write when she was a child and, although she has the use of her hand now, she

has never taken the trouble to learn to write. In fact, she says that that is the only thing that has kept her out of the penitentiary, for if she had learned to write she would probably write something that would lead to her conviction."  
 "How do you account for the fact then that these letters are all in the same chirography?"  
 "Simply that she has always had the same amanuensis, I presume."  
 "Have you any idea who this amanuensis is?"  
 "Yes. At least I know the one she used to have when she was probably writing to Clayburn. Her name is Rosie Veech."  
 "Do you know where she is now?"  
 "Yes, she is at home, I think. She lives with her mother, a widow, who lives about a mile from the village, near where the coal mines used to be."  
 An idea occurred to the detective.  
 "Suppose this should be the little girl who had saved his life in the old tunnel?" he mused.  
 "What kind of a looking girl is she?" asked the detective.  
 "A small, spare girl with light hair and blue eyes—not particularly pretty."  
 "It is the same," Thad mused aloud.  
 "Eh?"  
 "I say I have seen her. She sometimes visits the old hermit or maniac named Reuben Slouthers, doesn't she?"  
 "Yes, she has kept the old beggar alive by carrying him food for I do not know how long."  
 "Well, here we are at the depot and the train is ready to start."

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### AN UNFORTUNATE MISTAKE.

THE words were scarcely out of the detective's mouth when the bell rung and he and his prisoner had barely time to get aboard when the train started.  
 They took their seats in the car and chatted along pleasantly for the next half hour, the time required to run in to the city.  
 Thad learned many new things about the case which he could have learned from no other source.  
 "There is one more question I should like to ask you, Mr. Langley," he said, when they had pretty well exhausted the subject of the correspondence of Miss St. Cloud, "and that is about Robert Clayburn. He is sole heir to the property there, of course?"  
 "Yes."  
 "But he would not have been had his brother lived?"  
 "He would not have had five cents' worth of it," rejoined Langley with a good deal of warmth.  
 "How is that?"  
 "His father willed everything to Roger several years ago."  
 "What was the cause of that?"  
 "The old man did not like Bob, and don't like him now."  
 "Was there ever any hard feelings between the brothers growing out of this fact?"  
 "Oh, yes. It was the cause of a great many fights between them at one time and another."  
 "In your opinion, is Bob a man that would do a desperate deed for the furtherance of his own selfish ends?"  
 "He would do anything."  
 "Not murder his brother?"  
 "Yes, even that, if he stood in his way."  
 "And he did stand in his way?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Do you mean to infer that he did kill his brother?"  
 "I say nothing. As I told you before, I could tell you who the murderer is, if I cared to, or rather if I dared to. But I do not and shall not. I have put you in the way of finding out the truth yourself and that is enough, it seems to me, to satisfy any reasonable man."  
 "Yes. You are right. I am asking too much. I should be satisfied with what you have already told me, and I shall not ask you to go any further."  
 By this time they had reached Jersey City and the two men alighted from the train.  
 They walked along toward the ferry like a couple of friends, Langley having taken the detective's arm.  
 When they had reached the ferry-house, Langley turned to the detective and said:  
 "You cannot imagine how much I appreciate your kindness, old man, in allowing me to come all this way without handcuffs on. Very few detectives would have been so considerate."  
 "Oh, I always like to treat my prisoners as well as they will permit me to. Some men won't allow you to treat them well."  
 "How is that?"  
 "Why, they persist in being so ugly that you are compelled to keep the irons on them."  
 "I presume so," observed Langley dryly.  
 "By the way this is New Jersey, isn't it?"  
 "Yes."  
 "And you have no extradition papers. At least I have seen none."  
 "No, but—"  
 "It was very nice of you to pay my fare here, and to allow me to ride without irons on my wrists, but as this is Jersey and the crime

for which you have arrested me was committed in New York, I would be a pretty fool to go over the river with you. Don't you think so?"  
 Thad laughed.  
 "Rather," he said. "Still, from the docile manner in which you came along, I imagined that you had overlooked the little discrepancy. You won't go over, then?"  
 "Not this eve. I'll take a drink with you, if you have the price of a couple."  
 "Certainly. Come on."  
 Five minutes later they entered a saloon.  
 "What is it?" asked the detective.  
 "Whisky," replied Langley.  
 "Well, that was pretty well played old fellow," observed Thad. "But when did the thing occur to you?"  
 "Not till we got on the train."  
 "Is that straight?"  
 "That is true."  
 "But tell me, were the stories that you have been telling me correct?"  
 "Every syllable."  
 "All right, then, I am ahead on the deal anyway. I could not have obtained the information as cheaply from any other source. And, as I told you, I did not intend to push your case very hard anyhow. If you had gone over with me the chances are that I should have set you at liberty as soon as we got over."  
 Langley winked and laughed.  
 "I believe you would, old fellow, and I think I could trust you, but do you know, I'm funny about one thing."  
 "What's that?"  
 "I always like to have a sure thing. It's so much more satisfactory. Here we go?"  
 "Drink hearty."  
 "And now I'll have to leave you," continued Langley. "We shall probably meet again sometime."  
 "Yes, I'll catch you over the other side before the year's out and then it will be your treat. Good-by."  
 "Good-by, sweetheart."  
 And the two men parted, Thad making for the ferry to cross to New York, and he had no idea nor care what became of his late prisoner.  
 It was late in the afternoon by this time, and Thad had eaten nothing since breakfast, so he stepped into a down-town restaurant and got some dinner, and then took the Elevated for Harlem.  
 He soon found the number which Langley had given him, which turned out to be a flat-house, and therefore he was at some trouble to find the party he was in search of.  
 Langley had given him no name, and unlike his usual precaution, the detective had forgotten to ask for the necessary particulars.  
 All he knew when he arrived at the number was that there was an old woman living there somewhere.  
 Fortunately there was but one old woman living in the building, and she lived on the top floor, so that he had less difficulty in finding her than he expected when he ascertained that it was a tenement.  
 His knock at the door on the fifth floor was answered by an old woman whom Thad spotted at once as one of the tough kind, and he had not been in the flat more than ten minutes before he was satisfied that it was a "fence" for stolen goods. This was impressed upon him by the great heaps of all kinds of goods piled up in all the rooms.  
 When the old woman opened the door, she looked suspiciously at the detective, who was still made up as the Italian artist, and kept the door only open wide enough to put her nose out.  
 "V'at you vants?" she inquired suspiciously.  
 "I come from Miss St. Cloud," said Thad.  
 "I don't vas know her," was the discouraging reply.  
 Thad saw that he had made a mistake.  
 The young woman was evidently known by some other name in this place.  
 "You know Mrs. Patchin, don't you?" he asked on a venture.  
 "Nein, I don't knows her needer."  
 The detective had but one more alternative. If that failed, he was done.  
 "You know Langley, of course?"  
 The old woman grinned, showing a pair of tusks and no other teeth to speak of.  
 "You mean Gussie?"  
 "Yes, the tall fellow."  
 "Yah, I knows him. V'at he vants?"  
 "He sent me for the iron box with the papers in."  
 The old woman opened the door for the detective to enter.  
 When he got inside she said in a sort of stage whisper:  
 "You means der pox v'at Betsy Oliphant left here?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Vell, dere vas monish due on dat pox, und I don't lets it go mithout dat vas paid."  
 "I understand that perfectly well, old lady, and I have brought you the money to pay every cent that is due on the box. Let me see, how much did Langley say it would be now?"  
 There was an avaricious twinkle in the old hag's eye. She evidently thought she had



struck a soft snap, and proposed to work it for all it was worth.

"I don't know v'at Gussie said it vas," she mumbled, "but I says it vas den tollars, den tollars," she repeated, apparently taking supreme delight in rolling the delicious morsel under her tongue.

"Cheap enough, old lady," exclaimed Thad, presenting a ten-dollar bill. "Here is your money as soon as you produce the box."

The old woman toddled off into another room, where she remained a long time, and finally came in with a small iron-bound box under her arm.

"Ish dat der pox?" she asked.

Thad was a little perplexed what answer to make.

It would not do to say bluntly that he did not know, for that would lead her to suspect that all was not right, and he was not willing to pay her the money until he knew what he was getting.

"Let me see," he mused. "That looks like it, and yet it has been so long since I saw the box that I almost forget. I can soon tell, however," he went on, taking out a bunch of keys and starting to put one of them into the lock.

"No you don't!" cried the old hag, snatching the box away. "You pays me mine monish before you opens dat pox!"

"Not by a jug full, old lady! What do you take me for? Do you think I am soft enough to pay you before I see whether it is the right box or not?"

"If you don't could tell mitout opening dat box, you don't vas know nuttings about it, und don't vas had no peesness mit it!"

Thad saw that there was no use of discussing matters with her, and that he had better run the risk of losing the money than the box, so he said:

"Oh, well, if you are going to be ugly about it, here is your ten dollars," handing her the money. "Now give me the box."

The old woman took the money, examined it critically, folded it up and put it away in her bosom, and then, instead of handing over the box, inquired:

"Who sends dis monish? Gussie?"

"Yes."

"Vell, dat vas yoost v'at Gussie owes me," she rejoined, complacently.

"But I have nothing to do with Gussie's debts. I want the box for that money!"

"Yah, but you don't vas get it till you gives me anudder ten tollars!" declared the greedy old woman.

"Look here, old woman, I don't propose to have any nonsense from you!" cried the detective, losing his temper. "Give me that box, or I will make it hot for you!"

"You vill? V'at vill you do?" screamed the old hag.

Thad drew a revolver and pushed it into her face.

"That is what I will do?" he replied calmly.

"Now give me that box or I will blow your head off in about a second!"

"Tug!" yelled the old woman.

The next instant a big, burly ruffian rushed out of the back room and made toward the detective.

"W'at's de mattah beah?" he demanded in a hoarse voice.

Thad saw that he was in for it, and that there was no use of wasting words.

"I want that box!" he replied in a firm voice.

"Well, ye won't git it, see?" growled the ruffian.

"Why not?" demanded the detective coolly.

"'Cause I won't let ye, see?"

Without a word Thad pushed the old woman out of the way and picked up the box.

"Drop dat box!" roared the ruffian.

"Not while you're living!" returned Thad.

The fellow made a rush for the detective.

That was just what he wanted above all things.

He let the ruffian get up to within a yard of him, and then shot his fist out and caught the fellow under the chin, and the latter went down in a heap.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### A FIGHT FOR THE STRONG BOX.

As soon as Thad got possession of the box, after knocking the ruffian down, he started to quit the place. He had reached the door and opened it, and was about to step out, when a new difficulty arose.

There had sprung up from somewhere, apparently from the earth or air, but probably from the flat across the hall, another burly ruffian.

How he should have known that there was anything between the detective and the people in the flat he had just left, was a mystery to Thad, but he apparently did.

The fellow confronted Thad with a dark brow and the stentorian demand:

"W'ere ye goin' wid dat box?"

Thad was in no humor to bandy words with the new-comer.

He had had enough of that.

His sole object was to get away, peaceably if possible, by fighting if necessary.

Without giving the fellow any answer, therefore, he attempted to push past.

But the ruffian was bent upon a fight.

He evidently imagined from Thad's make-up that he was a weakling.

The fellow put out his hand to stay the detective.

"W'ere ye goin' wid dat box, I axed ye?" growled the ruffian.

Thad saw that nothing short of a fight would satisfy the fellow.

So instead of replying in words Thad just quietly laid the heavy box on the floor behind him, and squaring off, let his antagonist have a sledge-hammer in the neck.

The fellow was standing some six feet from the top of the stairs leading down to the next floor, and when Thad struck him, he turned a back somersets, went over the top step and rolled all the way down to the next floor.

Thad waited for no more hindrance, but determined to make his escape at once.

But when he stooped to pick up the box, it was gone.

The wily old woman had taken advantage of his altercation with the ruffian to steal the box.

And to make matters worse, when he turned to enter the place in search of it, he found the door locked.

What was to be done?

It would be dangerous work to attempt to break the door down, as the ruffians inside would have the advantage of him.

Besides he would give them the opportunity of having him arrested as a common felon, which would delay matters greatly.

Therefore his only chance was in strategy.

Thad cast his eye about the hall for a moment, and then looked down the stairs.

The bully whom he had knocked down had just regained his feet.

He was evidently in a bad humor and in a condition to fight.

As Thad looked, the fellow began to re-ascend the stairs.

There was blood in his eye.

A happy thought occurred to the detective.

If he could only find some place of concealment, the bully would think that he (Thad) had gone into the flat of the old woman, pound on the door, most likely, and bring the other ruffian out upon himself.

Thad glanced once more about the hall for a place of concealment.

At first there seemed to be none.

But a second later he noticed a ladder going up to the roof.

It was only twenty feet from the old woman's door, but the darkness of the hall had prevented him from seeing it before.

The ruffian was by this time half-way up the stairs.

There was no time to be lost.

Springing to the foot of the ladder, Thad glided up with the agility and noiselessness of a cat.

In less than a minute he was crouching upon the top rung against the roof.

The bully came on up and, as Thad had expected, was surprised and disappointed at not finding him where he had left him.

The fellow glared about with an angry scowl, and Thad could see that he was spoiling for a fight.

It never occurred to the fellow, it seemed, to look up the ladder.

And, if he had, the chances are he could not have seen the detective in the thick gloom.

Finally the fellow appeared to despair of finding his man in the hall, and concluded, as Thad thought he would, that the latter had gone inside.

He therefore commenced pounding furiously at the door.

For a time there was no response, and the bully repeated his knocking more vigorously than before.

Still there was no response.

The bully's wrath increased momentarily.

He repeated his knocking, this time with an energy that threatened to split the door or wrench it from its hinges.

All the time he was growing more and more furious.

At length he ceased pounding with his fist and fell to kicking the door.

This created such a din that everybody in the building was aroused, and heads appeared all along the corridors on all sides.

Finally, just when the bully's patience seemed about exhausted the door suddenly flew open, and the other ruffian confronted him.

The latter was wrought up to a state of fury that was little short of desperation.

The moment he espied the man who had been creating the racket, he sprung out and struck him a telling blow in the breast that staggered him, but did not knock him down.

This only increased the other bully's anger, and as soon as he recovered from the blow he had received from the bully who had just come out, he made a rush for him like a mad bull.

The other was ready for him, and the two ruffians clinched.

They appeared to be pretty evenly matched, and for a time it was a question which would be the winner.

But after a few seconds' tussle the man from the flat began to get the best of it, and back the other away from the door.

Just then the old woman came out, with a heavy cane in her hand, and apparently wanted to take a hand in the fight.

The men were by this time within a few feet of the top of the stairs, and it appeared to be the aim of the more powerful of the two to push the other over.

Meanwhile the old woman had followed them up, leaving the door of the flat open.

This was Thad's opportunity.

Gliding softly down from the ladder, he managed to slip into the flat unobserved.

Once inside he began the search for the box.

He had hoped that in the excitement the old woman would set the box down within sight.

But he was disappointed in this.

And he saw that there was an endless task before him in hunting for the box among the mountains of miscellaneous plunder piled on every side.

Nor was the labor of the task its worst feature.

The fear of having the big bully in upon him at any moment, would naturally render his position unpleasant.

But Thad was not a man to shirk duty or flee from danger.

He was set upon obtaining that box, at all hazards, and at once set to work searching for it.

Having seen the old woman bring it out of another room in the first place, he argued that it was likely that she had taken it back to the same place.

He therefore quit the room where he was, and proceeded to the one next in the rear.

Here the plunder was piled in greater confusion than in the front room.

And what was worse, there was no light in there.

Fortunately, however, the detective had his dark-lantern in his pocket, and lighting it, he set about his search.

To avoid a sudden surprise from the occupants of the flat when they should return, Thad closed the door leading to the front room and locked it.

He then set to work in dead earnest.

Throwing the flash of his lantern into every nook and cranny of the room, he scrutinized every object that came in his way.

Pile after pile of clothing, furniture, old books and every conceivable description of plunder, was gone over, pulled apart and looked into.

The character of the box was such that it was not likely to be mixed in with these articles; but the detective did not feel satisfied to leave any place unsearched.

So rapid was his work, that in fifteen minutes after his entrance he had gone over nearly everything the room contained, and had certainly searched every nook where such a thing as a box eight inches square could be concealed.

Still no box had been found.

Thad then proceeded to the next room, and, as in the first instance, locked the door behind him.

This was a lucky precaution, for scarcely had he begun his search of the second room, when he heard pounding at the first door he had locked.

This urged him to greater speed with his hunting, although it never occurred to him how he was to get out after he had found the box.

The plunder was, if anything, in a worse state of confusion than in either of the other two rooms.

But Thad was not inclined to pull it all down, as he had done before.

It occurred to him that, in the haste in which the old woman must necessarily have been, she would not have taken the trouble to conceal the box, but would just have set it down in the first place she came to.

He flashed his light in every direction and gave a hasty glance at everything in his way, and noted its appearance. He also took note of every place which could be made available to secrete an object such as he was searching for.

The only place that appeared available for hiding anything was a closet. Thad tried the door and found it locked. But that did not deter him long. Taking his bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket, he had the door open in no time.

But just at the instant he got the closet open, he was startled to hear the bully in the adjoining room.

He had got the first door open in some way, and now began to work at the one next to Thad.

The detective saw the necessity of haste.

The ruffian was evidently in a very bad humor, for he was swearing terribly.

Thad flashed his light inside the closet, and took a hasty survey of its contents.

Like every other part of the house, it was crammed with plunder. He took a rapid inventory of everything in sight, but not seeing



the box, was about to abandon the search, when his eye accidentally fell upon a shelf away up at the top of the closet.

Flashing his light up there, he caught sight of something that attracted his attention.

It was the corner of an iron-bound box.

It was undoubtedly the object of his search, but it was too high for him to reach it.

Looking about the detective saw a chair.

Grasping this and placing it in front of the closet, he mounted the chair.

Still he was not high enough to reach the box.

Meanwhile the ruffian was working diligently at the door, and every second the detective expected to see him burst in upon him.

Time was precious.

Thad sprang down from the chair upon which he was perched and grasped the first thing that came in his way. It was a small box.

This he placed on top of the chair and mounted it.

He could now reach the coveted box, and grasped it eagerly.

But his troubles were not yet at an end.

The box was attached to a chain, and would not yield to his tugging!

What was to be done?

He examined the chain, and found that it was attached to the box by means of a padlock.

Once more the detective had recourse to his keys.

The bully was still working at the door, and from the present indications he would have it open in another second.

Would Thad have time to unlock the chain before the villain got in?

Thad placed the key in the lock.

Luckily the first one he tried threw the bolt.

The lock yielded!

The chain dropped off, and the detective lifted the box from the shelf.

He sprang down from his perch, and looked about for some means of escape.

At that instant the ruffian burst into the room, and confronted the detective with a pair of murderous revolvers!

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE BIRD FLIES INTO THE NET.

THAT the ruffian meant business Thad could see at a glance.

The flash of the fellow's eye and the firm set of his jaws indicated that.

And the detective realized that he must either fight his way out, or do some very clever dodging.

He did not lose his head, but remained perfectly cool.

Looking the ruffian squarely in the eye, Thad said, in his usually calm voice:

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

This was a surprise to the fellow, and it disconcerted him.

He could not find words to reply for a minute or so.

At length he made out to falter:

"Ye kin lay down dat box, see? afore I plug yer!"

"Which box, this one?" asked Thad innocently.

"Yep," growled the ruffian.

Thad's motive in starting the conversation was to gain time and get as near the fellow as possible.

For he knew that when the bully's anger had had time to cool a little, he was not so apt to use his pistol.

And Thad's object in wanting to get near him was, that it would not be so easy for him to use his weapon when very near him, and besides it would give the detective an opportunity of grappling with him.

"Why, this box belongs to me," continued Thad, still moving nearer and nearer the fellow.

"How's that?" he growled.

"I bought it."

"Of who?"

"The old woman."

"That don't count, young feller," snarled the ruffian. "Ye've goter buy it o' me, if ye wants it."

"Oh, I see," rejoined Thad, as though the idea had never occurred to him that there was any objection to his taking the box. "How much do you want?"

This put a different face on matters.

The moment the fellow saw a chance of making something out of the transaction, he lost all ambition to fight.

"Why, I dunno," he answered, lowering his pistols. "I won't be hard on you. Say fifty."

"Fifty dollars?"

"Yep."

"That's reasonable."

And, putting the box under his arm, Thad put his hand into his pocket as if to get the money.

This threw the fellow completely off his guard. His eyes at once dropped to the level of the detective's pocket.

That was Thad's opportunity.

Quicker than a wink he shut off his light, leaving the room in total darkness.

Waiting for about ten seconds, during which he hardly breathed, he flashed his light again,

this time square in the ruffian's face and with the lantern not more than six inches from his nose.

The effect was startling.

The fellow sprang several feet into the air, staggered back, caught his foot in some of the plunder and fell backward upon the floor.

Before he had time to regain his feet, Thad sprang over the prostrate man, and in a twinkling was out of the front door into the hall.

Everything had now become quiet.

What had become of the old woman, the detective neither knew nor cared. She was not in sight. Neither were the rest of the tenants of the building.

Thad lost no time in reaching the street.

It was now after ten o'clock at night, and the street in that up-town neighborhood was as quiet as the grave.

As the detective descended the stoop, however, the rumble of carriage wheels broke the stillness of the night.

The night was densely dark and it was raining.

Thad pulled his coat up around his ears and was about to start on a run for the nearest Elevated station, when the carriage drove up in front of the building he had just left, and stopped.

For some reason he was attracted by the incident and paused in the shadow of the next stoop to see who alighted from the carriage.

The side door of the carriage opened and a tall man alighted.

Thad was all alert in an instant.

His mind reverted to Langley.

But before he had time to give this much thought, a small lady sprang out, without the assistance of the man.

In an instant Thad had crept along the curb and stationed himself behind and in the shadow of the vehicle.

Almost the first words he heard uttered were:

"Is this your wrap, Dory?"

That settled it.

The voice was unquestionably that of Langley, and the woman could be none other than Miss St. Cloud.

For an instant Thad was at a loss what to do. Had there been but the one, and he had not been incumbered with the box, his course would have been clear.

As it was, he was well-nigh helpless.

And then, to make matters worse, while he was deliberating the couple entered the house, and closed the door.

The carriage started to drive away, and this brought the detectives' deliberations to a sudden termination.

Hailing the driver, Thad requested to be driven down-town.

The driver, only too eager for a passenger back to the city, stopped, and Thad climbed in.

Directing the driver to put him down at 133 West Thirteenth street, the detective, with his box safe between his knees, settled back in his seat, while the carriage rolled away.

Half an hour afterward the vehicle stopped in front of his lodgings on Thirteenth street, and the detective alighted and proceeded to his rooms.

Having put away his box in a safe place to be opened and examined at a more convenient period, Thad sat down to think of how he should proceed.

He was very tired, having slept none for going on forty-eight hours, and yet he felt it his duty to return to Harlem and arrest the two criminals as soon as possible.

But how was the thing to be done?

Intrenched in the stronghold of the big bully he had had the encounter with, it would be a bitter fight, unless he should call the assistance of the police, a thing he always dreaded and disliked to do.

And then he began to wonder at Langley's conduct.

Why had he returned to this house with the girl, after giving the detective the address.

Did he not know that he was running into a trap and dragging her into one?

Or did he rely on the prowess of the big bully for ample defense, and expect to entrap the detective at the same time?

While sitting in his easy-chair smoking a cigar and pondering over these questions, the detective finally grew drowsy, and from drowsy to hopelessly sleepy, and at length he sunk into a deep sleep.

How long he slept, he could not tell. It seemed to him but a minute or two, but it must have been as many hours, when he was suddenly awakened by a loud rapping at his door.

Thad sprang to his feet, and, for an instant, could not recall where he was. Casting his eyes about, however, and beholding his familiar surroundings, it all came back to him.

Meanwhile the knocking at the door was repeated, and Thad stepped to the door and opened it.

He found a messenger-boy with a letter for him.

Returning to the light and tearing open the epistle, he was astonished to find that it was from Langley.

The letter was as follows:

"MY DEAR MR. BURR:—

"Can I trust you to fulfill your promise of clemency in case I allow you to meet me on this side? I believe I can, and therefore invite you to meet me at the St. James Hotel on Broadway.

"Come at once, as I have important news for you.

"Very truly yours,

"AUGUSTUS LANGLEY."

Thad did not hesitate an instant. Whatever danger there might be in going alone into the den at Harlem, there could be none in going to the St. James. There, at least he would be on equal footing, which was all he asked at any time.

Five minutes later he was on his way to the St. James, through the pouring rain, and in twenty minutes was at the hotel.

He was in the same disguise that Langley had last seen him in, therefore when he walked into the hotel bar and found Langley standing there, the latter at once recognized him and put out his hand.

"This is a surprise for you, eh, old fellow?" he observed.

"Rather," rejoined Thad, grasping his hand. "What's the occasion?"

Langley drew him one side and lowered his voice to a confidential tone, notwithstanding there were few people in the bar at that time of night, (it was after midnight.)

"She's up there," he said, jerking his thumb in the direction of Harlem.

"Miss St. Cloud?"

"Yes. I have decided to give her up. It is my only hope. So long as she is abroad I am in constant danger of falling into her net. She now insists upon my going into a matter that will hang me if I do it, and I am sure to do it, unless she is put where she cannot get at me."

"Very well, I have a warrant for her. I will go up at once and arrest her."

"No, you needn't do that. Let me go with you to your office (I presume you have one) and I will write her to meet me there in the morning. She will come, and then you can arrest her. Only, when you see her coming, you must lock me up so that I cannot get near her."

"I will do as you say," rejoined the detective, smiling at his strange request; "but why do you fear to come near her?"

"Because, if I was at liberty, I should assist her with all my power to resist you."

Thad laughed at the oddity of the thing.

"Very well, come on. We may as well go at once, and we can have a chance to catch a few winks of sleep between now and morning, which we are in need of."

Langley made no reply, but followed the detective, and they were soon sitting comfortably smoking and talking.

A little later they retired, and both men being greatly fatigued, were soon asleep.

Thad was astir early, and after making his toilet, returned to the front room, where Langley had insisted upon sleeping.

On entering the room he was surprised to find the young man up and dressed, and sitting behind a table, with a large revolver (Thad's), in each hand, resting on the table and pointing toward the door out of which Thad had to come.

"Hello, old fellow! What's up?" demanded the detective, a little startled at the sight.

"Is it a bargain?" asked the young man, with a serious countenance.

"What do you mean?"

"We forgot to speak of it last night, and for all I know, as soon as you get the nippers on the girl, you'll turn on me. Do you intend carrying out your promise?"

"Certainly, old fellow. You have nothing to fear from me. Put away your guns. You have done too much for me to think of prosecuting you."

At that moment there came a rap at the door.

"That's she!" cried Langley. "Hide me away and lock me in!"

"All right. This way!"

And Thad shoved him into a closet and locked the door, after having slipped on a pair of whiskers.

The next moment he unlocked the door and Miss St. Cloud stepped in.

She had never seen Thad in this particular disguise, and did not recognize him.

She stared at him for an instant, and, suspecting that something was wrong, started to run, but Thad caught her arm, and the next instant had the handcuffs on her—a pair that she could not slip off.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### LOOKED LIKE A MIRACLE.

CONTRARY to Thad's expectation, Miss St. Cloud made no resistance, but accepted her fate quietly and philosophically.

When the irons were on her she glanced about with a despairing look, and then asked in a feeble voice:

"Where is Gussie?"

"Langley?" asked Thad.

"Yes."

"He's gone."

"Ah, well, I might have expected as much. You can trust none of them. Tell me, did he



not decoy me down here, on purpose to betray me, sir?"

"I have nothing to say in the matter," replied Thad coldly. "If your pals betray you, it is no concern of mine. You should either lead a better life or have better pals in your profession."

"It is all well enough to talk," she sighed, "about leading a better life or having better pals either. One is as easy for some people as the other. It is no fault of mine that I lead the life I do or have the kind of friends I have."

"Your friends are probably as good as you deserve. But sit down, Miss St. Cloud, I desire to ask you a few questions."

She sunk wearily into a seat, with the remark:

"Go on."

"First of all, I want you to tell me whether you did or did not write the letter to Martin Hopkins which bears your signature, confessing the murder of Roger Clayburn."

"I did not write it, I dictated it," she replied.

"Well, is the allegation therein expressed true?"

"That I murdered Clayburn?"

"Yes."

"I refuse to answer."

"Very well. You obtained possession of the letter from me some days ago. Have you the letter still?"

"Certainly not, I destroyed it."

"You also got possession of the prize medal which was awarded the dead man at college. Where is that at present?"

"I do not know."

"The letter and medal were both taken from me while in an unconscious state, by old Reuben Slouthers. Did you receive them from him?"

"I did."

"What are your relations to him, and why has he taken such an interest in this case and such a bold stand against me?"

"My relations to him are that of a friend. He knows that the world is against me, as it is against him, and for that reason he is my friend. He is the only friend I ever had that did not betray me."

"How about your cousin Charlie?"

"Cousin Charlie? I have no cousin named Charlie," she affirmed, indignantly.

Thad looked at her in surprise.

Up to this point she had adhered tolerably close to the truth, but now her mania for falsehood—Thad could think of it only in the light of a mania—began to assert itself.

The detective, knowing her weakness in this respect, did not propose to quarrel with her, but go on with his catechism, and draw his own inference from her answers.

"You have forgotten the promise he made you of doing me up, then?"

"I never heard of such a thing."

"Were you not at the Jersey City Ferry on Tuesday evening about eight o'clock?"

"I was."

"Who was with you?"

"Gussie was with me awhile. I went down there alone, and met him."

"Did you go to Plainfield that night?"

"I have not been in Plainfield since the night you met me and snatched my veil off."

Thad was horrified at her brazen-faced falsehoods, but he continued:

"How did you get possession of the letter and medal, then?"

"Hopkins brought them to me."

"And he obtained them from old Reuben, did he?"

"Yes."

"What were your relations to old Anthony Maxwell?"

"Only that of a friend."

"But he did not know you in your real character?"

"Not lately. He used to know me, and it was always understood that Roger Clayburn and I were to jointly receive all his fortune at his death, but lately, since Rogers's death, it seemed that he had made up his mind to bequeath his wealth to some charity. That was my reason for disguising and going there to read to him."

"Was that your reason for wanting to murder him, too?"

"I had no desire to murder him, before God, I did not. My only intention was to rob him; but it seems that either Gussie choked the poor old man too hard or the fright occasioned by the sight he witnessed killed him."

"Who was Mrs. Oliphant whom the old man dreaded so much?"

"That was Hopkins."

"Was he also trying to get hold of the old man's money?"

"For me—yes."

"Not for himself?"

"No, except the fees he was to receive."

"What had Robert Clayburn to do with that affair, and what has he had to do with any of your crimes?"

"Nothing whatever."

"What has Langley?"

She was silent a moment, and bit her lip.

"I oughtn't to exonerate him after the shame-

ful manner in which he has betrayed me; but I will. Whatever he has had to do with my affairs, he has been forced into it by my irresistible will power, under which he was as helpless as a child."

"You exercised a sort of hypnotic influence over him then."

"Yes, although I know nothing of what is known as hypnotism."

"Did you not have the same power over Robert Clayburn, Miss St. Cloud?"

"Yes; but he managed to elude me."

"What do you know about the old woman whose house I saw you enter on one hundred and twenty-fifth street?"

"Nothing, except that she keeps a fence for the goods stolen by thieves."

"What had you to do with her?"

"That is my business," snapped the young woman indignantly.

"Very well. We will go now."

"Go where?" she asked in surprise.

"To the Tombs."

"Not while I live!" she cried frantically, jumping to her feet.

Thad expected that the woman was about to offer some desperate resistance, but she did nothing of the kind.

"Tell those whom I hate and who hate me," she said, "that Lil Slouthers never yielded to the last!"

And before the detective could stay her hand, she drew a small silver-mounted pistol and, placing it against her temple, blew her brains out!

The next moment Thad heard a terrific rumpus in the closet where Langley was confined, and opened the door for him.

Langley rushed out, white and agitated.

Approaching the lifeless form of the unfortunate woman, his eyes filled with tears and his face became a picture of woe.

"Poor girl!" he murmured. "Your troubles are ended, and many another person will breathe freer for your going, and yet my heart never ceased to beat for you! You were the only woman I ever loved!"

This was the third man Thad had heard make this assertion, and he began to wonder how many more hearts she had broken.

He said nothing to the poor, grief-stricken man, though, and they soon left the place together to report the case to the coroner.

Having attended to this matter and seen that the remains were removed to an undertaker's, Thad made preparations for another trip to Plainfield.

On taking leave of Langley, the latter said:

"Allow me to thank you, old man, for using your judgment in this matter. Another man would have been influenced by appearances, and had me in the lock-up long ago. Thank God, the girl exonerated me at the last!"

"Yes, she did," admitted the detective; "but you know how little regard she has for the truth."

"She told you nothing but the truth in this interview, as you will soon discover."

"I wish I could think so."

"You will not think so; you will know it shortly. Now, let me tell you something. You heard that I was a detective, did you not?"

"Yes," replied Thad.

"So I am, or was. I belonged to a private agency and was detailed to work up a case against this woman. But when I came to meet her, I found that she was a girl whom I had known from her childhood, and the moment I came into her presence she began to assert the mysterious influence over me which you have seen. From that moment I ceased to be a man—I was an infant in her hands."

"Who and what is she, anyway?" asked Thad.

"That I can never tell you, but, as I told you before, the facts are in that box. You got the box, I believe?"

"Yes, I have it here."

"Very well. Open it, and there you will find the whole matter. But don't ask me to tell. She was true to me to the last, although I betrayed her, and I will not be false to her now that she is gone."

"You are right, old fellow," exclaimed the detective enthusiastically. "You are a noble fellow, Langley, and I respect you for your loyalty. Give me your hand."

And thus they parted.

That afternoon Thad returned to Plainfield, taking the strong box with him.

His first place of calling was at Dr. Mortimer's.

The doctor was delighted to see him.

"I have news for you, Mr. Burr," he cried, as he grasped the detective's hand. "The little girl detective is making progress. She has made two reports."

"What are they?"

"Miss St. Cloud left secretly for New York last night, and had not returned at the latest report."

"Um. I fear she never will return," replied Thad.

"What do you mean?"

"Miss St. Cloud is no more."

"Dead?"

"Dead, and by her own hand!"

"Horrible! How did it happen?"

Thad related the incidents which led up to the arrest, and finally of the suicide, and concluded by saying:

"I was sorry to have to make the arrest after our agreement, but the way the thing came about there was no other alternative."

"I am sorry, too," said the doctor, dismally. "For I had hoped that we might possibly find the girl innocent. You do not know how passionately I loved her!"

"Yes, I hoped all along that we might find her innocent of this particular crime; but, although she refused to confess her guilt in this case, she did not deny it, and admitted being guilty of a great many other crimes. So I am of opinion that it is better for all parties that she is gone."

"Perhaps so; but it is hard to turn one's soul against the person it has worshiped so long."

"By the way," said the detective, desiring to get him away from the gloomy theme, "has the little detective run across the medal yet?"

"No, nor the letter, either."

"The letter, Miss St. Cloud herself informed me, is destroyed."

"It is just as well. But here comes the little detective now. Perhaps she has some news."

At that moment the girl romped into the office.

"What news, Angy?" demanded the doctor, eagerly.

"Great news!" she cried, out of breath. "Miss St. Cloud has just returned from New York and brought her Cousin Charlie with her!"

Thad and the doctor stared at each other in blank amazement.

"Come to life, by Jove!" cried the doctor.

"A miracle!" ejaculated the detective.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE LIGHT BEGINS TO BREAK.

THAD and the doctor were speechless for some moments after the remarkable announcement.

By degrees, however, they came to themselves.

"What can it mean?" was the doctor's first inquiry.

"Simply," rejoined the detective, "that there is some mistake somewhere. Either the child is mistaken or there are two Miss St. Clouds, or at least two people resembling each other very strongly."

"I am not mistaken, sir," insisted the child. "I saw her with my own eyes. And besides, I saw her Cousin Charlie. I couldn't be mistaken in him, he's so big."

Thad could not refrain from laughing at this remark.

"There is something in that, I'll admit," he observed. "The fellow's big enough to be seen and recognized any distance. And yet three people who ought to be well acquainted with him, including Miss St. Cloud herself, have told me that they never heard of such a person."

"What shall we do?" asked the doctor.

"I know what I shall do," replied the detective. "I shall go over and see for myself."

"Aren't you afraid of the big cousin?"

"Not a bit of it. Won't you go with me?"

The doctor reflected a moment.

"I do not know how I will be received," he said at length. "Still, for the sake of helping to clear up this mystery, I will run the risk of being snubbed."

The two men left the office together, and proceeded to the St. Cloud residence, while little Angy ran on ahead.

As they walked up the gravel path toward the house, Thad said:

"I expect that we shall have a stormy reception, but we may as well have it done with one time as another."

"You have met this cousin, have you?" said Mortimer.

"Yes, once."

"What kind of a man is he?"

"A perfect gentleman, so far as I saw."

"He will probably act with reason, then."

"I hope so. But even gentlemen do not always act with reason when a female is mixed up in the case."

"True. But here we are at the house. We shall soon see what we are to expect."

With that the doctor stepped on the stoop and rung the bell.

Instead of the girl coming to the door, as usual, Miss St. Cloud herself opened it.

Thad could hardly believe his eyes.

But there she was in the flesh, and not only that, but she was actually smiling, which showed that she bore no ill will against the detective.

She must have noticed Thad's expression of mingled perplexity and apprehension, for she said, in a cheerful voice:

"Come in, Mr. Burr. You need have no apprehensions. I know all about it. Come in, doctor," she went on, turning to Mortimer.

The two men followed into the sitting-room, where they were met by Summers, the big cousin.

He smiled as he shook hands with Thad.

"This has been a queer piece of business all around, old man," he remarked. "It is fortunate for both of us, perhaps, that I discovered



what I did yesterday afternoon. Otherwise there would have been murder somewhere!"

"As it has turned out, however, interposed Miss St. Cloud, "we must thank, first the doctor here for starting this inquiry, and second you, Mr. Burr, for carrying it out. Otherwise I do not know where it would have ended."

This was all a mystery to the detective.

He could make neither head nor tail of it.

They had evidently made some discovery, but what it was he could not so much as surmise.

The young lady saw his perplexity, as well as that of the doctor, and hastened to explain.

"But this is all Greek to you, gentlemen," she observed. "So I will explain. But first of all, read this letter, Mr. Burr. It will go a long way toward making matters clear."

And she handed him a letter written in a hand which was strangely familiar.

The letter was as follows:

"DEAR MISS ST. CLOUD:—

"My race is run. The time when I should stop masquerading under a name which does not belong to me has arrived. You, no less than everybody else in the community, have wondered what to make of certain rumors in regard to your conduct at times. Even the detective who is now on my track, and who will sooner or later, I feel, run me down, has been as completely mystified as the rest of them. This I can explain in a few words.

"In the first place, I have been wronged by those who should have been my best friends and protectors, and this imbibed me against the world. My brother was driven to insanity by disappointment and committed suicide, which drove my poor old father insane. And then, to crown all, the man whose money, rather than his talent, procured him the prize medal which my brother should have had, added to the wrongs he had already done our family by ruining me.

"What, then, I ask you as a woman, as a sister, was there left for me?

"When a woman loses everything else, money is the only thing left for her. The accumulation of money furnishes her occupation, drowns her sorrows and blunts the sensitive nature which allows her to suffer; besides, the possession of it gives her power.

"I therefore devoted my life to the accumulation of money. I made plenty of it, but not enough to satisfy me, and not easily enough.

"Through my acquaintance with Roger Clayburn I discovered that he was heir prospective to a large fortune, jointly with yourself.

"Here was my chance. Accidentally bearing a strong physical resemblance to yourself, art aided me in rendering that resemblance perfect. Our own mothers could hardly have told us apart.

"In this disguise, and with your name, I masqueraded. I made the acquaintance of your uncle Anthony Maxwell, the old miser, and induced him to change his will so that I (in your name) would get all the money. This would have been all right, had not Roger Clayburn discovered the trick and informed the old man who I was. I had possession of the will, but Roger got possession of it and tore it up before my eyes.

"That drove me to desperation.

"I determined to avenge three wrongs—the one done to my dear brother, the first one he had done to me and the present one—by killing him.

"The opportunity at length presented itself and I carried out my scheme of revenge.

"Borrowing Robert Clayburn's pistol, I waylaid his brother in the grove and shot him, and threw the pistol into the bushes, hoping that it would be found there and identified as Robert's property, and the crime fixed on him.

"But unfortunately the pistol was not found, and the crime was fixed on the last man in creation that would have been guilty of it, and the last man that I would have had convicted of it, Doctor Eldridge Mortimer, for he was kind to me on several occasions when I hadn't a friend in the world.

"Then, and not till then, was I sorry for what I had done, and I tried all in my power to save him.

"I wrote to Martin Hopkins, confessing the crime, and asking him to use his best efforts in the young man's behalf.

"Luckily, however, the evidence was not needed. Mortimer was acquitted without it, and my next purpose was to regain possession of that letter, which stood as a constant menace against me.

"But it has disappeared, and no one seemed to know what had become of it, until Detective Burr ran across it some place, and then, through the combined assistance of Hopkins and my father, I got possession of it and destroyed it.

"I also had the medal in my possession which I obtained through the same means, but it disappeared, and I do not know what has become of it.

"I forgot to say that after old Maxwell discovered the fraud I was attempting to play on him, he made a new will, bequeathing all his property to you and Doctor Mortimer.

"That is all. When you are reading this, I may be on the other side of the dark river. I surely will if I am caught by the detective who is on my track. I will never go to prison—never!

Farewell.

LILLIAN SLOUTHERS."

Thad drew a long breath.

"Well, this is the most remarkable case that has ever come under my notice. I have traced a good many blind trails, but this beats them all. And I must give that woman credit for being as clever a rogue as I ever ran across. You do not wonder now, Miss St. Cloud," he continued, turning to the young lady, "that I thought you inclined to stretch the truth."

The young lady laughed.

"Indeed I do not. The wonder is that you did not arrest me long ago."

"I should have done so some days ago only for the doctor here. It was through him that I put it off and did what you were probably not aware of, had you shadowed by your own maid."

The young lady laughed again.

"What, Angy playing the spy on me?"

"Yes."

"I wondered why she had all of a sudden become so anxious to act as my maid, when I have been unable to get her all along. And I also wondered why she had suddenly taken such an interest in all my affairs, asking me a thousand questions about every detail of my business. Really if I had not liked the girl exceedingly, I should certainly have dismissed her before she was in my employ an hour."

"She has the right stuff in her for a detective," said Thad, laughing. "It is unfortunate that she hasn't more of it to do."

"No, I shall keep her as my maid, if she will be less inquisitive in future."

"She will have no occasion to be inquisitive in future," observed the detective. "But let us speak of some other matters. I hope that you are satisfied now that the doctor here is an innocent man."

"I, for one, am," cried Miss St. Cloud enthusiastically, jumping up from her chair and crossing the room to where he sat. "Doctor, give me your hand."

"The very question I would have asked you long ago, Miss St. Cloud, if it had not been for this unfortunate circumstance which rendered my name unfit to offer to any lady."

And the doctor arose from his seat and grasped her hand warmly.

"Do you mean that?" demanded Summers, crossing over and extending his hand to the doctor.

"I certainly do," replied the doctor. "And will make the request now in presence of all our friends."

Miss St. Cloud blushed, and the big cousin looked foolish.

He glanced first at his cousin and then at the doctor.

He seemed bewildered.

"Well," he finally drawled, "I see plain enough that I'm not in it. I had a kind of a sneaking notion of making the same proposition myself, but I'm always about a year behind in such matters. I have no objection, just so Dory is happy."

The young lady laughed and blushed.

"You talk about your not being in it, Cousin Charlie," she said. "It strikes me that you are arranging matters to suit yourselves without consulting me, as though you didn't consider me in it."

"By no means," rejoined the doctor, approaching her and taking her hand again. "Miss St. Cloud, I simply and honestly ask you for your hand before all these witnesses. You are a free woman and a sensible one. Do as you please."

She was silent a moment.

"It isn't the least bit romantic," she finally said. "But I'm going to accept the proposition just the same, because I love you and always have in spite of all that has been said and done."

"Well," said Thad, rising, "this is a most pleasant termination of an unpleasant affair. The doctor and I thought we were coming here to have a fight, and instead of that he gets a 'The fighting will come later,' suggested Summers."

"I hope not," responded the detective. "But now I must go. There are several things to be settled up in this matter yet. First of all we must find that will, which I do not apprehend will be much trouble, as it is probably in the box which I left at your office, doctor. And then I must see if I can find that medal."

The doctor did not reply until they had left the house, and were on their way to the office.

"Where do you think of going for that?" he then asked.

"I shall go to Robert Clayburn. He must either have it or know where it is. It does not make much difference now who has it, only I want to know where it is and how it got out of the possession of this woman who has been impersonating Miss St. Cloud. There may be a story back of it that has never come to light yet."

"What do you mean?" asked the doctor.

"I mean that I still do not believe that the murder was committed by this woman. She evidently knew something about it, but she never, in my opinion, committed the crime."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because, in the first place she did not talk like a murderess. She exhibited none of the symptoms of one. She is too practical, both in her speech and in the letter I have just read."

The old look of despondency returned to the doctor's face.

"Then, for God's sake, hurry and find the real murderer, for until he is found the cloud still hangs over me."

"Not at all. These people have seen enough to satisfy them of your innocence, and the village will soon know of it. And so far as you are concerned, feeling that you are innocent, you need not care who the real criminal is so long as it does not reflect upon you."

"Still, I shall not feel at ease until he or she is found."

"I cannot blame you for that," said the detec-

tive warmly. "Neither will I. But don't worry. I shall soon find out who it is. Now that I think of it, Langley said that I would find it all in that box. We will go at once to the office and examine the contents of the box."

They quickened their pace and were soon at the office.

Thad, who was in the lead, stepped in quickly and eagerly and looked in the place he had left the box, but was surprised to see that it was gone.

"My man has probably seen it here," observed the doctor reassuringly, "and taken it into the house. I will call him."

The man was called in and questioned.

"Yes, the box was there," he answered, "but a man came here a little while ago with a written order from you for it, and I let him have it."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF AFFAIRS.

THAD had got beyond the point where he could be surprised with anything that occurred in this case, otherwise he would have been surprised as well as discomfited at the mysterious disappearance of the box which had cost him so much to obtain, and that, too, just as his work appeared to be almost completed.

As it was he simply shrugged his shoulders and said:

"This, in a measure, bears out my theory that the woman was not at the bottom of all this devilry."

"It bears out the idea that, although Caesar is dead, Caesar's spirit still lives," rejoined Mortimer.

"There is no doubt of that. She must have friends who are either attempting to carry out the work begun by her or else they are bent upon avenging her death."

"I wonder who they could be."

"I think I could guess."

"Who?"

"In my opinion it lies between old Reuben Slouthers, her father, and Robert Clayburn."

"You astonish me!"

"I do not doubt it."

"For in the first place, Robert is a man far above such an act, and old Slouthers is too crazy to be able to plan it."

"Don't you believe it. He is not half so crazy as you imagine he is. Besides, maniacs are very sagacious sometimes."

"But in regard to Robert Clayburn. You do not know him as I do, or you would never speak in that way of him."

"Doubtless not, and if you knew him as I do, you would not wonder at anything at his hands."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have seen him in the society of people that no honest man would associate with."

The doctor looked at him in surprise.

"You surprise me more than ever," he exclaimed. "I have known Bob since we were schoolboys together and never knew of a dishonorable action on his part."

Thad saw that the argument, if continued, would create hard feelings and be conducive of no good, to say nothing of the loss of time it incurred, so he determined to shut it off.

"Oh, well," said he, "we will never arrive at anything in this way. You know the young man from an honest man's standpoint and I know him from that of a crook, or what is about the same thing, that of a detective. You will see whether you or I are right all in good time. I am going now to see him."

"And make no effort to find the box?"

"Oh, yes, that will be incidental to my other visits. I will know something about it before the day is over, if it is still in the village."

It was late in the afternoon when Thad reached the Clayburn residence, and Robert had just finished his dinner and come out on the veranda to smoke.

He greeted the detective with a cordiality that surprised him.

He evidently did not suspect what was in store for him.

Thad seated himself on the porch and lighted a cigar.

"How is the case coming on?" asked Robert to start with.

"First rate," replied Thad. "Beyond my expectations."

"I presume, then, that you have pretty well made up your mind by this time who the murderer is."

"Yes, I have an idea."

"I'll wager that I can guess."

"Well?"

"It lies between Miss St. Cloud and Mortimer."

"Perhaps," answered Thad dryly. "But what I desire to speak of now is a little removed from that. You remember the medal I showed you on my first visit?"

"Yes, my brother's."

"Yes. Do you know where it is at present?"

"I do not. I haven't seen it since you showed it to me."

"Pardon me, Mr. Clayburn, but I happen to know that you have seen it since then."



Clayburn jumped to his feet in a state of fury.

"Do you mean to insinuate, sir, that I—"

"Sit down," said Thad, in a quiet voice. "There is no occasion for getting excited."

Clayburn resumed his seat mechanically.

"I insinuate nothing," pursued the detective, in the same calm, dispassionate voice. "I say that I know that you have seen that medal since I showed it to you."

"How do you know it?"

"Well, sir, there is no use of concealing anything now. I saw you looking at it, in company with the woman who was masquerading at that time as Miss St. Cloud and Augustus Langley, in the latter's room on Twenty-fourth street, New York. Is that explicit enough?"

Clayburn turned as white as marble and became so agitated that it looked as though he would fall off his chair.

"It was the night," pursued Thad, "that the Slouthers woman planned the robbery of old Maxwell, and tried to coerce you and Langley into assisting her."

Clayburn pulled his chair up closer to that of the detective and dropping his voice to a confidential whisper, said:

"Speak lower, please, I wouldn't have the folks to know anything about this for the world!"

"With pleasure," responded Thad, in a softer tone of voice. "But tell me, do you know where this medal is at present?"

"Before God, I do not! If I did, I would tell you."

"Have you ever seen it since that night?"

"I have not."

"How am I to know whether you are telling me the truth or not? You told me just now that you had not seen it since I showed it to you."

"I swear it! More than that, I can prove by Langley that I have not."

"How does he know that you have not?"

"He knows that I have not been in the city since then nor seen the woman."

"Have you no idea where it is?"

"I'll tell you the most likely place."

"Well?"

"Old Reuben Slouthers is more likely to have it than any one else in the village."

"That is probably true. Do you know anything about a strong box which contains the will of old Maxwell and some other important papers?"

The young man became more agitated than ever at this question.

"N-no," he finally faltered.

Thad looked him squarely in the eye.

"Do you not know, Mr. Clayburn, that you forged an order in Doctor Mortimer's name and sent to his office this afternoon and got that box from the porter?"

"I know that I did nothing of the kind. In fact, although I admit that I knew of the existence of such a box, I had no idea that it was in the village. The last I heard of it, it was in a house on 125th street, New York."

This speech was uttered in such a frank and straightforward manner that Thad was inclined to believe it.

"Do you know what the box contains?"

"I do not, beyond the will and some letters."

"You do not know what the letters pertain to or who they are from or addressed to, eh?"

"I have no idea."

"Who is there in the village, in your opinion, that would be sufficiently interested in this box to steal it?"

"I can think of no one, except it would be Martin Hopkins or old Reuben."

"It is not Hopkins, that is sure."

"Why?"

"He is in jail in New York."

"Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Then it must have been old Reuben."

"Is he keen enough for such a thing?"

"Keen enough? Why, sir, that old chap is one of the keenest men in the village. Before he became insane he was one of the most successful business men."

"And you think he still retains cunning enough to carry out a scheme of this kind, do you?"

"Unquestionably."

"Very well, I shall go there at once and find out."

Clayburn made no reply till Thad arose to go, and then said:

"I have been thinking the matter over, and I do not know whether it will be a good plan for you to go alone. The old fellow is very suspicious and cranky, and the chances are that you would have a fight on your hands as soon as you got there."

"Perhaps I had better get a constable to go with me," suggested Thad.

"Or, what would be better still, let me go along. Disguise yourself in some way, and I will go along and introduce you."

"That is a good idea. What shall be our plan?"

"Well, the old fellow wants to sell his land there, but nobody will pay the ridiculous price he asks for it. How would it do to introduce you as a real estate agent?"

"Capital. I can make myself up in five minutes if you will let me have a mirror."

"Step right in here," said Clayburn, leading the way into a lavatory.

Thad went in, and five or ten minutes afterward came out with a respectable full beard and bushy eyebrows, and a complete change of countenance, so that his best friends would not have known him.

"Now we are ready," he observed and they left the house.

"Now, what was the plan you had laid out?" continued the detective as they walked along.

"Oh, I will have to leave that to you," observed the young man.

"Very well, my plan is to get the old chap interested in his land and have him take me out and show me the farm. Then, as soon as we are out of the way you take charge of the box, if you can find it."

"That will do admirably. I will get the box out of the house and leave it somewhere for you, and as soon as you get rid of him you can join me."

"That is the idea. Now let us walk briskly, for it is getting dark and the old fellow will be going to bed before long."

A brisk walk of half an hour brought them to the old hermit's hut, and Clayburn knocked at the door, but there was no response.

He knocked again with the same result.

"This is funny," observed the young man.

"I wonder where he can be."

"Perhaps he has gone down into his tunnel," suggested Thad.

"His what?"

"His tunnel. Didn't you know that he had a tunnel under his hut that he can dodge into whenever he desires?"

"No."

"Well, he has. It is an old abandoned coal-mine I believe, and he has an opening and a pair of stairs going down into it."

"That is probably where he has gone then. We will wait for him."

"I think while we are waiting," observed Thad, "I will improve the opportunity to call on my little friend Rosie Veech. I have a lot of questions to ask her."

"You can save yourself that trouble," remarked Clayburn, glancing over the hill in the direction of the Veech cottage, "for here she comes now."

Sure enough as Thad looked in the direction he saw the slender figure of the girl who had brought him the provisions in the mine tripping over the hill.

Five minutes later she came up to the cabin where the men were standing.

"Good-evening Rosie," said Robert.

"Good-evening, Mr. Clayburn," she returned, and glanced wonderingly at Thad.

"You do not know me, do you, Rosie?" asked Thad.

"No, sir," she answered shyly.

"Don't remember the man to whom you brought the provisions in the tunnel?"

"Oh! Are you the man, sir?" she asked with an incredulous stare.

"I'm the man."

"You've let your beard grow so I didn't know you."

"Yes, my beard has grown considerably," rejoined Thad, laughing.

"Oh, I thought sure you were killed when I saw you fall with that rope!" she cried.

#### CHAPTER XXX.

##### DAMAGING REVELATIONS.

THAD did not reply at once.

In fact, his attention had been attracted in another direction.

The three strode near the door of the hut, Rosie with her back toward it, Thad with his side toward it, and Clayburn facing it.

The detective had noticed, or imagined he had, a strange expression upon the young man's face for some seconds before and after the girl's arrival, but thought little of it at first.

Finally, however, when Clayburn saw that Thad was engaged in conversation with Rosie and evidently imagined that he was too much engrossed to notice his (the young man's) action, he moved cautiously a little nearer the door.

At the same instant Thad saw the door open a few inches and his keen eye caught a glimpse of a face within.

A glance at the wild, demoniacal eyes glaring out through the narrow opening convinced the detective that their owner was none other than old Reuben the maniac.

Clayburn bent his ear close to the crack between the door and jam and appeared to be listening intently.

He could catch nothing of what was said, and he noticed that Clayburn made no reply.

Whether the nature of the communication he was receiving was such as to require no answer, or that the young man was afraid to venture a response lest he should be detected, the detective could only surmise; but Clayburn never so much as moved his lips.

This continued for a minute or so.

Clayburn could not avoid seeing that Thad had noticed him.

He grew nervous and confused.

It was evident that he would have given a good deal to be away from the door, although the intelligence he was receiving was plainly interesting and impressing him deeply—but he dare not move lest the detective should discover the person who had been talking to him, and consequently suspect the plot which was (presumably) being hatched by the maniac.

Thad saw his dilemma and, while he did not suspect what was in the wind, he felt sure that something was brewing, and that it meant no good for him.

He was therefore determined to come at the truth at once.

And for the purpose of throwing the plotters off their guard, he resolved upon a ruse.

Turning to Rosie, he said:

"Rosie, let us take a walk, as I desire to speak to you about certain matters."

And, before the girl realized what he was about, Thad had taken her by the arm, wheeled her about and started off as if for a stroll.

Thad kept a watch—out of the corner of his eye—upon Clayburn, and when the latter imagined he was unobserved, he opened the cabin door quickly and stepped inside.

Rosie had not noticed the young man's conduct or the detective's scrutiny of him up to that moment; not until he actually stepped inside—which caused Thad to stop and look around.

This attracted the girl's attention and she also looked toward the cabin.

A look of surprise came into her face.

She glanced inquiringly at Thad.

Their eyes met.

Still neither spoke for an instant.

Finally Thad observed:

"Gone in to interview old Reuben, I suppose."

"I suppose so," answered the girl shyly.

Thad was silent a moment, and then continued:

"Rosie, if you don't mind, suppose you go on home, or wherever you like, and let me go back to the cabin for a few minutes."

The girl stared at him in surprise.

"But I thought you wanted to speak to me about something?" she remarked.

"So I do—later. Come back in, say, half an hour. Won't that do, little girl?"

"I suppose so—if you desire it that way, but—"

"But what?" interrupted Thad impatiently.

"Nothing—only Reuben wanted me to come in about two hours from the time I saw him, and that is about two hours ago."

"Well, old Reuben can wait another half-hour, little girl. This is more important."

"Very well, sir," she answered, with a note of regret in her voice.

She turned away and was soon descending the hill.

Thad took no further heed of her for the moment, his mind being engrossed with the other matter.

So he darted off toward the cabin again.

When within a few feet of the door, he paused and glanced back to where he had left Rosie.

To his surprise, instead of proceeding on down the hill, as had apparently been her intention, she was still standing within a few feet of where he left her, and staring up toward the cabin.

As soon as she observed him looking at her, however, she turned and darted away.

Thad then approached the cabin and put his ear close to the door.

He could distinctly hear everything that was uttered by the men inside.

They were talking about the medal when he first began to listen.

"You must let me keep the medal," insisted a voice which the detective had no trouble in recognizing as that of old Reuben.

"What use have you for it?" demanded Clayburn.

"The same that you have—to keep it as a memento. Only I have some reason for keeping it for such a purpose, and you have not."

"Why haven't I?"

"Because it can at best but remind you of your crime, and—"

"Stop!" cried Clayburn, excitedly, "I will hear this from no one, much less from you, who committed the act!"

"I committed the act?" cried the old man in a dreamy voice.

"Yes, you! Do you deny it?"

Old Reuben did not reply at once.

He appeared to be stunned by the accusation, and was struggling to comprehend whether it was really true or not.

"Do you deny it?" repeated Clayburn, vehemently, bringing his fist down upon something—probably a table—with a bang.

"N-no," faltered old Reuben, in a scared voice.

"I thought you'd hardly have the nerve to deny it to me."

"N-no, I do not deny it. I killed poor Roger, I killed poor Roger there in the grove. Poor old crazy Reuben did it. And he had good cause to do it. Did not Roger bring me to what I am?"

"Yes, yes, he did," returned the young man, eagerly. "You had good cause for killing him."



"Yes, he brought me to what I am. It was he that snatched the laurels from my poor boy's brow and took the medal which my poor boy had worked so hard to earn!"

"That he did."

"And drove my poor boy to a suicide's grave," continued the old man in a maudlin voice.

"So he did," echoed Robert, gleefully. "So he did, old man."

"And it was he that ruined my poor innocent daughter and made her the outcast she is."

"Or was, rather," interposed Clayburn.

"Eh?"

"She is no longer an outcast, Reuben," observed the young man in a cold, practical tone.

"What do you mean?" gasped the old man.

"I mean that your erring daughter is no more."

"Dead?" shrieked the old man.

"Dead."

"How do you know?"

"I just received the information this afternoon, from—"

"From whom?" interrupted Reuben, wildly.

"From good authority."

"Are you sure? Is there not a possibility of there being a mistake?"

"I am sorry, for your sake, Reuben, that there is not," rejoined the young man in cold, passionless tones.

The poor old man made no immediate response, and Thad could hear him sobbing.

Robert was also silent for some minutes, but finally appeared to grow impatient.

"Well," he began, in the same dispassionate voice, "under the circumstances I do not know but you may as well keep the medal, Reuben. But the box, where is that?"

The old man seemed to be too much overwhelmed with grief to answer immediately, and Robert appeared to be giving him time in which to recover.

After a reasonable time, however, he apparently lost his patience.

"Do you imagine that I've got time to sit here and wait for you all night?" he growled.

"Eh?" as though aroused from a dream.

"I asked you what you had done with the box," repeated Robert.

"The box?" dreamily.

"Yes, the box! You haven't forgotten it?"

"No, no, no! I know now. The strong box that you gave me the order for."

"Yes; where is it?"

"Safe."

"Where?"

"In the tunnel."

"Where no one can find it?"

"Where no mortal can ever find it."

"Good! Now, Reuben, let me tell you something. That box contains certain documents which are very valuable, and certain others which are not so valuable—"

"Except to certain parties," interposed old Reuben, with a chuckle.

This appeared, for some reason, to startle the young man.

"What do you mean, Reuben?" exclaimed Clayburn, breathlessly.

"A certain letter, for instance," chuckled old Reuben.

This appeared to mystify the young man more than ever.

"You speak in riddles, Reuben," he said.

"Explain yourself."

"You do not understand me?"

"No, I'll be hanged if I do."

Old Reuben gave vent to a low, guttural laugh, which lasted for over a minute.

"You know, Robert," he resumed, at length, "that sometimes people get in a tight place."

"Well?"

"They find themselves handicapped on account of somebody else being in the way."

"Yes. Go on."

"It becomes necessary to get this somebody out of the way."

"What has all this palaver to do with what I asked you?" demanded Robert, impatiently.

"Don't lose your patience. I am coming to it."

"Well, hurry."

"So I will. Well, as I was saying, it becomes necessary or important to get this somebody out of the way. But there is an impediment in the way."

"Well?"

"The party hasn't the courage, or is so situated that it is impracticable or inconvenient for him to do it himself."

"Now, look here—"

"Don't interrupt me. What does that party do?"

"Go on."

"He makes arrangements with another to do his dirty work."

"But, what—"

"Keep quiet. In order to get somebody to do his dirty work, it is important that he select some one who has an ax of his own to grind."

To Thad's surprise, Clayburn burst out in a peal of sardonic laughter.

"I see what you are driving at," he cried.

"Not yet. You think you do, but you don't yet."

"Well, get through some time."

"So I shall—all in good time. This party, I say, selects some one who has wrongs of his own to avenge. This, the party in question imagines, will suffice to clear his own skirts. He thinks that the person whom he has selected having committed the actual deed, will be afraid to peach—"

"What do you mean?" roared Robert, savagely. "Do you mean to threaten me?"

"Threaten you? No," returned the old man, wildly.

"What am I to understand by all this palaver, then?"

It was now old Reuben's turn to laugh.

"That old Reuben is not half as crazy as some folks think he is," he rejoined.

"You mean to intimate that if you were so disposed, you could make the case look ugly for me, I presume?"

Old Reuben roared.

"How well you guess," he responded.

"Look here, you old lunatic!" growled Clayburn, "do you understand what you are saying?"

"I think I do."

"Well, I don't think you do."

"And I know that I do."

"See here, suppose you should get it into your crazy old head to peach, as you call it, who do you imagine would believe you? Who could you find in all this community that would take your word against mine?"

"No one, probably," admitted the old man timidly.

"Then what are you talking about?"

"I do not expect any one to take my word," continued old Reuben, as though he had not been interrupted. "Old Reuben is too crazy for that."

"Rather," laughed Robert.

"But they would take yours, Robert."

"Certainly they would!"

"Especially if you wrote it."

"Eh?"

"Especially if you wrote down and signed your own signature to it."

"What do you mean?"

"You don't happen to remember writing old Reuben a letter directing him what to do, after the latter refused to do it unless your order was put in black and white, do you?"

"Yes, but what has that got to do with it? You told me yourself that the letter was destroyed when I asked you for it."

"Possibly I did, and that is what led me to remark awhile ago that old Reuben was not as crazy as some folks think he is."

"Do you mean to tell me that that letter is still in existence?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"In my possession."

"Why did you not destroy it, as I instructed you to do?"

Old Reuben chuckled merrily.

"Because the old man's not quite an idiot or a lunatic."

"But what good can it do you?"

"It might be of great value to me some time. If you remember, you promised in that letter to pay me one thousand dollars for the job—"

"As soon as I got the will made over to me," intercepted Robert.

"Even so."

"Well, can't you take my word for it?"

"Hardly."

"What?"

"Your word is good enough, so far as it goes; but your paper is better. Besides, outside of the promise given in that letter to pay me over the money—which is all the guarantee I have in case anything should happen—it might come about that this detective or some other detective should trace the murder of Roger to old Reuben. Now, do you think that old Reuben is fool enough to kick the one little stool from under him, when the noose is already about his neck?"

Clayburn gave vent to a forced laugh.

"There's not the least danger, Reuben, of this detective or any other discovering the author of the crime. And even if there was, what good would it do you to implicate me?"

"Misery loves company," chuckled old Reuben. "Besides it always goes easier for a man when he exposes the real criminal."

"What—!"

"Don't deny it! You know that old Reuben, crazy as he is, and much as he craves vengeance for his many wrongs at the hands of your brother, would never have come to the point of shedding human blood only for you! Only for the fact that you hounded him day and night, talking to him, inflaming his already burning soul with your eloquence and little by little instilling your poison into him!"

This speech appeared to have the effect of completely cowering the young man.

He was silent a few moments, but at last, burst forth in an imploring voice.

"For God's sake, Reuben, have mercy!" he cried passionately. "Give me that letter, and I will pay you the thousand dollars at once."

The old man laughed derisively.

"What do you take old Reuben for?" he asked coldly.

"A good, generous, noble—"

"But not good and generous enough to put his neck into the halter for another. Oh, no. Not if you made the amount ten thousand instead of one!"

"Then, sir, if you will not listen to reason, I will use stronger logic!" roared Robert. "Reuben Slouthers, give me that letter, or I will kill you this instant!"

The next instant Thad heard a struggle going on.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A HEARTLESS FIEND.

FEARING from what he had heard that murder was about being committed, Thad tried to open the door, but found it fastened.

He was not to be deterred from his purpose, however.

So he threw his weight against the door.

To his dismay, it proved more substantial than he had imagined.

It resisted his utmost force as though it had been constructed of oaken timbers.

This was a surprise to the detective, who had supposed the door to be made of frail materials.

Again and again he threw his ponderous weight against it, but all to no purpose.

It would not yield.

In the mean time he could hear the struggle going on within.

This stimulated his efforts.

He had no doubt that, unless he could soon effect an entrance, murder would be committed.

And he renewed his efforts.

Still the stubborn door would not yield.

He finally despaired of forcing the door by means of his own strength, and looked about in quest of something which he could employ as a battering-ram.

It was growing dark and he could discover nothing at any distance.

He walked away from the door and made a tour of the cabin in search of what he desired.

But when he had completed the circuit he found himself as badly off as ever.

He could find nothing heavy enough to use for a catapult.

As he again neared the door, Thad put his ear to it and listened.

All was silent now.

Horrors!

The crime had been committed!

And Thad felt almost as guilty as though he had had a hand in it, because it was committed under his very nose, and he had been powerless to prevent it.

There was but one thing to be done now.

He could but await the coming of Clayburn.

As soon as the young man should emerge from the cabin, he would accuse him of the crime and make him confess.

The detective sat down upon the door-step and resolved to wait.

And thus half an hour went by.

The moon arose and threw its silvery sheen over the wild, desolate landscape, and Thad surveyed his surroundings.

Slowly his keen eyes swept over the landscape as far as they could reach.

Not a soul appeared to be stirring.

He was just reflecting upon the loveliness of the scene, when he heard some one laugh gently in his immediate vicinity.

Thad jumped to his feet and gazed in the direction.

A patch of shadow, produced by the angle of the cabin, screened the person, whoever it was.

A thrill ran over the detective.

He was not in the least frightened, but a feeling of apprehension came over him.

He realized that it would be better to be on his guard.

So he put his hand upon his revolver, and peered again into the patch of gloom.

Nothing could be seen distinctly, but as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he discovered the outlines of some one standing at the corner of the house.

Thad's first impulse was to rush upon the mysterious intruder and take him by surprise, but upon maturer reflection, he recognized the folly of such a move.

He therefore abandoned it for another.

He would speak to the person.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in a stentorian voice.

Without answering, the mysterious individual stepped timidly out into the moonlight.

Thad was surprised.

It was none other than little Rosie!

"What, Rosie!" he cried. "Is it you?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, timidly.

"What were you doing there, little girl?"

"Why, sir, when I came up a little while ago, I saw you sitting so quiet that I thought you were asleep, and I didn't want to disturb you."

"Very considerate of you," laughed the detective. "Have you been here long?"

"No, sir, only a few minutes."

Thad regarded the simple, upturned face for a moment in silence.

"Rosie," he said, at length, "is there any way that you know of, of getting into this cabin?"

"No, sir, unless you have a key. Is the door locked, sir?"



"Not only locked, but bolted, I should say. I have been trying my best for an hour to break this door down, but have failed."

"What do you want to get in for?" she asked, in her simple, innocent way.

Thad was on the point of communicating his suspicion to the girl, but upon second thought he decided to do nothing of the kind.

No good could be derived from harrowing up the child's innocent soul.

So he simply answered:

"Mr. Clayburn went in there some time ago, and as I have good reason to believe that the old man was in there, I am a little uneasy about Robert, especially—"

"Yes, I saw him go in," interrupted the girl. "But you needn't have any fears for his safety." Thad was surprised at this remark.

Especially as it was made in a flippant, half-laughing manner.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, curiously.

"Mr. Clayburn is all right," she rejoined.

"How do you know?"

"I just saw him a moment ago, sir."

A feeling of horror came over Thad.

The young villain had murdered the old man, and then effected his escape by way of the tunnel, rather than venture coming out the front way.

Thad held his breath for a moment.

At length he ventured another question:

"Was anybody with him, Rosie?" he asked.

"No, sir."

Then his worst fears were realized, or nearly so.

Clayburn had evidently murdered old Reuben, gone down into the tunnel, or wherever the old man had concealed the box, and either taken the box itself or opened it and removed such papers as he desired, and made his escape through the tunnel.

An idea occurred to him.

"Was Clayburn carrying anything when you saw him, Rosie?" asked Thad.

"No, sir—nothing that I could see," she replied.

"No box or anything of that kind?"

"No, sir."

Robert had opened the box, then, thought the detective, and removed whatever papers he required.

"Which way did he go?" resumed Thad after a little reflection.

"Up the hill, sir. I thought he was coming here."

"He had come out of the tunnel when you saw him, of course?"

"Maybe he did, though I don't know for sure."

Thad reflected for a few moments, and arrived at the conclusion that the only way to ascertain whether Clayburn had really killed the old man or not was to get into the cabin; and the only way to get into the cabin was by way of the tunnel.

But this would require a good deal of time, and Thad was anxious to find Clayburn first.

If the young man had really killed old Reuben, he would doubtless attempt to decamp from the village that night.

Thad did not intend that he should do anything of the kind if he could help it.

"Rosie," he said at length, "I have got to return to the village to attend to a little matter, and may not be back to-night. I shall be here to-morrow, though, when I want you to show me the way into the tunnel."

"All right, sir," responded the girl with an inquiring glance at the detective's face.

Seeing the look of inquiry in her countenance, Thad continued:

"I cannot tell you just now, little girl, why I want to go in there, but I will to-morrow. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Thad shook her slender little hand and hurried away.

He took his course directly toward the village. A fast walker at all times, he exceeded himself on this occasion.

A half an hour or so later he was approaching the residence of the Clayburns.

Thad had thought it best to go there first, as Robert would be most likely to return home to make some kind of preparation before starting off upon a journey, if it was only to the city.

He approached the house and rung the bell.

As soon as the servant appeared, Thad inquired if Robert were in.

To his surprise the attendant answered in the affirmative.

It surprised him, because he had naturally expected that if the young man were in, he would have instructed the servants to say that he was out.

Thad entered the reception-room, and during the short interval between his entrance and Robert's appearance his thoughts were busy.

Would Robert dare to face him?

And if so, what kind of a face would he put on?

Should the detective begin by accusing him of the murder of old Slouthers, and extorting a confession, or take his chances on working him up to the point by degrees?

These, and similar questions presented themselves to Thad as he sat there awaiting the arrival of Robert, and he had just arrived at this point, without having answered any of his own questions, when the door was flung open and Robert Clayburn, calm and placid as a May morning, strode in.

Approaching the detective and extending his hand, the young man said:

"How are you, old fellow? What became of you?"

This transparent attempt at bluff exasperated Thad to such a degree that he was barely able to retain his temper.

The fellow's assurance was appalling.

Did he not know that the detective was aware that he did not come out of the hut as he went into it?

Controlling himself with an effort, however, Thad responded:

"That is the very question I would ask you, young man. Where did you go?"

"Nowhere. When you strolled off with the girl, I waited for you for some time, and concluding that you were going to make a night of it, I got tired of waiting and came away."

Thad was dumfounded.

He had heard liars, but that man was about the coolest one he had ever encountered.

However, he decided to make no comment or allow the fellow to know that he was acquainted with all his movements after their parting, and to humor him in his version of the affair.

"In that case, it is needless to say that you did not see old Reuben," continued Thad.

"No, of course not."

"Didn't even enter the cabin?"

"No."

Thad looked him straight in the eye.

"A funny thing occurred after you left," he began, in a jocular tone.

"Yes?" responded the young man, as though he had been a thousand miles away at the time.

"Yes. A few minutes after I left you I turned back, leaving Rosie, who returned home. My reason for turning back was that I had seen, or thought I saw, a young man about your age, and who resembled you very strongly, enter the cabin."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And when I returned to the cabin and listened at the door, I was surprised and horrified to hear the young man and somebody whose voice resembled that of old Reuben, fighting."

"Indeed?"

"It is true; and so wicked became the combat that I was afraid some one was being murdered."

"Hardly so bad as that, I should hope," rejoined Robert, with a yawn.

"But my impression is that murder was committed," insisted the detective.

"Do you, really?"

All this time Thad had looked him straight in the eye, and yet the fellow never flinched.

Thad did not know what to make of it.

He was more than ever satisfied that Clayburn had killed the old man.

The fellow's coolness under ordinary circumstances would have argued in his favor.

But upon the heels of his denial of facts which the detective knew, it had a contrary effect.

It was bravado, pure and simple.

"So positive am I that murder has been committed," pursued Thad, "that I propose to go back there to-night to investigate, and—"

"You would like me to accompany you," interposed Robert.

"Yes; that is what I called for."

Thad fully expected Clayburn to offer some excuse for not going, but, to his surprise, the young man instantly rose from his seat and said:

"Certainly, with pleasure. Nothing can afford me more pleasure than to go over and investigate this matter. You know I take a great deal of interest in these romantic affairs. Be with you in a moment, old man."

With that he bustled out of the room, and returned a few moments later with his hat and a light overcoat on.

"Now I am at your service," he remarked.

Thad made no comment, and the two men left the house.

The detective could find nothing to say for the first few minutes of the walk.

He was too much overwhelmed with this fellow's cold-bloodedness.

A man who could commit a murder, as he believed he had, and an hour afterward not only discuss it in a flippant tone, but actually volunteer to visit the scene of his crime, was a little too much for Thad, accustomed as he was to depravity.

Clayburn, on the contrary, was unusually loquacious and jolly.

He talked of everything, cracked jokes and laughed incessantly.

As they passed along and the moonlight illuminated the young man's face, Thad took occasion several times to steal a glance at it.

He was struck with the contrast between the face and the man's demeanor.

The face was drawn and wore an expression of dread and apprehension.

This had been absent when the detective was

conversing with Robert in the house, which convinced Thad more than ever that the fellow was acting a desperate part.

In addition to this, Thad caught him on one or two occasions looking at him with savage eyes as though the fellow would enjoy throttling the detective.

Thad gave the matter very little thought, feeling that he was in every way his companion's superior, if the latter should attempt any violence.

Finally they arrived at the grove.

There were two paths, one passing through the grove and the other around the outside.

Robert stopped at the junction of the two paths, and asked:

"Which way?"

"No matter. Around, I suppose," rejoined Thad.

"Afraid, eh?" and the fellow indulged in a fiendish laugh that was calculated to make one's flesh creep.

"No, I'm not afraid," retorted the detective sternly. "And, since you put it in that way, we'll go through the grove."

With that he led off in the path which traversed the grove.

Thad had little doubt now that the fellow's object in accompanying him in the first place, no less than his proposition to go through the gloomy wood, was for no other purpose than to get an opportunity to put him—the only witness to his crime—out of the way.

Still, Thad did not fear him, but when they had gone a little way along the path the detective pretended that he did not know the road well enough to follow it in the dark, and made this an excuse for getting the young man in the lead.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### A COWARDLY ATTACK.

THAD and his companion pushed on in silence for some distance.

The young man was in the lead, and Thad felt perfectly secure.

The bravest man dreads a foe at his back and in the dark.

At length they got about half way through the grove and reached the darkest and loneliest portion of it.

Robert paused and turned to the detective.

"Here is where Roger was shot," he observed, in a cold practical tone, as though he had been speaking of the most common-place matter.

Thad shuddered at the fellow's heartlessness, but made no response.

"He must have passed along here where we are," continued the young man, "and the assassin was concealed somewhere at one side of the path, possibly in this thick clump of bushes, from which he fired."

"A most fiendish and cowardly action," interposed Thad, unable to restrain his indignation.

"Well, yes," mused the other. "I presume it would be called that. Still, when a man has an object in life upon which his whole soul is set, he is apt to avail himself of the old Christian teaching, that the end justifies the means. We cannot all be philosophers you know."

"That is true; but that is no excuse for being a coward and a fiend!" retorted Thad, vehemently.

Clayburn laughed.

"You are savage," he said, dryly.

"No, I am in earnest, that is all," rejoined the detective, forcibly. "But let us get on."

Clayburn laughed again, and so far from proceeding as requested, stepped to one side and started slowly along the diverging path where Thad had found the pistol.

Thad could only see his head and the upper part of his body, outlined against the sky.

The rest of him was buried in the deep shadow.

He was chagrined and angry at the fellow, no less for his flippancy than for his senseless waste of time.

Still the detective did not remonstrate with him.

Thad thought he would give him a little time in which to go over the scene of his crime.

There appeared to be a fascination about the place which the fellow could not resist.

In the mean time Robert had continued to follow the path, and was by this time some two hundred feet from the detective.

The latter sunk down upon the fallen tree, where he had sat when he heard the dialogue between old Reuben and the woman whom he then believed to be Miss St. Cloud.

This he did for two purposes.

First, he was fatigued and desired to rest; and second, he knew that by sitting upon the log, his head was buried in the gloom, instead of being silhouetted against the sky, as a target.

He noticed, also, that Robert was out of sight.

Thad could hear his footsteps, however.

For some minutes he continued to sit there, partly musing upon the strange events of the past week, and the strange characters he had encountered, and partly wondering how far Robert would go, and when he would be likely to return.



Finally the sound of the young man's footsteps died away entirely.

Then Thad began to suspect that the fellow had played him a trick.

That he had absconded.

Thad did not wonder at this.

Robert had doubtless lost his nerve when it came so near the pinch, and could not make up his mind to go back to the cabin—the scene of his latest crime.

Thad was angry at the fellow for his perfidy, nevertheless, and decided to go without him.

He arose from his seat on the fallen tree and glanced about him.

No one was in sight.

He listened.

At once he imagined he heard the snapping of twigs, but in a different direction from that taken by Robert.

And when he listened again all was quiet.

He determined to wait no longer, and stepped out into the path.

Just then he imagined he heard the snapping of twigs again.

This time much nearer than before, and at the back.

Thad turned his eyes in the direction.

Nothing could be seen.

Again he turned about and was about to pursue his journey.

But at this instant two bullets whistled past his face in quick succession, followed by a couple of flashes and a couple of sharp reports not twenty yards away from him.

Quicker than thought Thad drew his own revolver and fired two shots in quick succession at the spot where he had seen the flashes.

Then he listened.

Not a sound could be heard.

Either Thad's pistol had done the business or his cowardly assailant was lying low.

Thad again started to leave the wood, when he was arrested by the flying sound of footsteps approaching from an opposite direction from where the shots had emanated.

The detective paused.

A moment later Robert dashed up out of breath.

"Did you hear that firing?" he gasped in a frightened voice.

"I did," rejoined Thad coolly.

"I—I wonder what it means," continued the young man, apparently abashed at Thad's coolness.

"Do not ask me," said the latter. "I was of opinion that you knew something about it."

"I?"

"Yes."

"How should I know?" innocently.

Thad was on the point of giving his views on the subject and his general opinion of the young man, whom he fully believed to be the author of the attempted assassination, when the other interrupted him.

"I kept on following the blind path which is supposed to be the course the murderer took after committing the act," he pursued, "and had become so lost in reverie that I had forgotten where I was, or that I had left you standing in the road, when suddenly I was startled by the sound of two pistol-shots quickly followed by two others. I wonder," continued Robert, modulating his voice. "I wonder if the would-be assassin had any intent upon either of us."

"If he had," responded Thad dryly, "he was wide of his mark, so far as I am concerned. I do not know how it was with yourself."

"Oh, he didn't come anyways near me. You see I was off that way," he said, pointing, "while the firing came from this direction," indicating the opposite point of the compass.

"Well, let us go—that is, if you care to accompany me," remarked the detective.

"Yes, we will go. It isn't safe here."

And the two men proceeded on their journey. Very few words passed between them.

Thad was oppressed with the suspicion that his companion had attempted to assassinate him, and the latter was embarrassed with Thad's coolness.

Half an hour's rapid walk brought them to the cabin of old Reuben, and both men paused.

"Shall I go in first, or will you?" asked Robert.

"You had better go in," returned Thad. "Although it is my opinion either of us will find some difficulty in getting in."

"How so?"

"The door is locked—or was when I tried it."

"When did you try it?" asked Robert quickly.

"When I heard the young man whom I mentioned apparently killing old Reuben."

"Oh," and Robert changed color.

He turned the side of his face which had been away from Thad before, as he spoke, and the detective was startled to see that that side of his face was covered with blood.

"Why, what is the matter with your face?" cried Thad.

"Nothing," rejoined the young man quickly, averting his face to conceal the blood.

"It can't be that the would-be assassin nipped you after all?" continued Thad.

"No, no. It is nothing, I tell you. A scratch which I received while going through the thicket, that is all. I will go in."

With that he turned toward the door of the cabin.

His agitation and anxiety to conceal the blood on his face aroused Thad's suspicions.

He was pretty well satisfied now that the fellow had attempted to kill him, and that the blood on his face emanated from a wound inflicted by the detective's pistol.

Thad did not mention his suspicions to Robert though, and in the mean time the latter had approached the door of the cabin, put his hand upon the handle and, to Thad's surprise, the door came open.

The young man entered the hut, and closed the door after him.

This conduct was a little surprising to Thad, and he suspected that Robert designed to conceal the evidence of his crime by hiding the old hermit's body before allowing the detective to enter.

Thad put his ear near the door, as before, and was surprised and gratified to hear what was unmistakably the voice of old Slouthers, in conversation with Clayburn.

And what caused Thad the greatest surprise was the fact that they appeared to be on the most genial terms, and were actually joking each other.

This upset the theory of murder, and Thad concluded that Robert had made some sort of a compromise with the old man to get possession of the papers, which accounted for his going out by way of the tunnel.

While the detective was still listening at the door, he was startled at hearing a footstep behind him, and looking about, was more than astonished at seeing Rosie.

"Why, little girl, what are you doing here this time of night?" he demanded, good-naturedly.

"Oh, sir, I often walk about such nights as these until ten or eleven," she answered. "Besides, to-night, I more than expected that you would be back, and I knew that you would want to speak to me when you did come."

"Yes, I do wish to speak to you," said Thad, "but—"

At that moment the cabin door opened, and the two men came out.

Approaching Thad, Robert introduced him, as per agreement, as Martin Jones, a land-buyer.

Old Reuben shook hands, and regarded the detective curiously.

"Pretty late in the evening to be coming out to look at land, ain't it?" he commented, after the ordinary formalities had been got through with.

"Yes, a little," rejoined Thad, "but—"

"The fact is," interposed Robert, "Mr. Jones has to leave early in the morning, and he did not hear of this land until late this afternoon. This is his last chance."

"Um, yes," grunted Slouthers.

And then to everybody's surprise—except, possibly, Robert's—the old man turned abruptly about and strode into his cabin, closing the door after him.

Each one looked at the other for an explanation, and each one seemed as much at a loss to understand the meaning of old Reuben's conduct as the others.

Finally all burst out laughing.

"He's a queer old duck," observed Robert. "But he will probably soon return."

They waited for a long time, but he did not return.

"I'll peep in and see what's the matter," said Robert.

With that he opened the cabin door and tried to peer inside, but it was so dark that nothing could be discerned.

He then threw the door open and walked in. Thad and Rosie watched the young man's movements as well as they could.

But it was so dark inside that little more than an outline of him could be seen.

Finally Robert lighted a match and proceeded with his investigation.

This he kept up for a long time.

Meanwhile Rosie had revived the subject of her own and Thad's first meeting in the tunnel, which appeared to interest her greatly.

"Oh, I never was so excited in my life!" she declared, "when old Reuben cut the rope and I saw you dashed down, down, I did not know where, but I thought surely to your death! But I felt good a little while later to see you walk away, and knew that you were not killed, though I thought you must be crippled."

"Fortunately I was not even injured," observed the detective. "And I—"

"He doesn't appear to be in there," interrupted Robert, coming out of the cabin at that moment.

"What could have become of him?" asked Thad.

"I cannot imagine," rejoined the other.

This surprised Thad somewhat.

Could it be possible that Robert was ignorant of the existence of the tunnel? Or was this some more of his acting?

Meanwhile everybody had lapsed into silence. But Rosie was not silent long.

The recollection of the perilous adventure in

the tunnel on the occasion of Thad's escape, appeared to have taken possession of her.

"Yes, sir," she suddenly broke in, "that was the awfulest adventure I ever saw, and hope I shall never see the like again!"

Robert turned away, and began pacing back and forth nervously.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### LIGHT AT LAST.

"YES," replied Thad, turning to Rosie again, "that was a perilous adventure, but luck appeared to be with me all the way through. But really I owe my life to you, little girl."

"Oh, don't mention it, sir," she faltered shyly.

In the mean time the girl had opened the door of the hut and peeped in, and seeing that the old man was not in, closed it again.

"Have you any idea where the old man is, Rosie?" inquired the detective.

"No, sir, though he can't be far off. I saw him here a little while ago. He was away this afternoon."

"Where had he been, do you imagine?"

"I don't know, sir. Maybe at the village."

"Was he carrying anything when he came back?"

"Yes, sir. He had a box under his arm."

"A box with iron hoops around it?"

"Yes, sir?"

"How long ago was that?"

"Not more than two hours before you were here this afternoon, I think."

"Did you notice where he put the box?"

"No, sir. He told me to go home and come back in about two hours and he would show me something. I think he meant something he was to take out of the box."

"Don't you think, Rosie, that he might have taken it into the tunnel?"

"Maybe he did, sir. Shall I see if he is down there?"

"How can you tell?"

"The trap-door will be unfastened."

The girl tripped inside the hut and soon returned with the information that the door was unfastened.

"Very well," rejoined Thad. "We will wait for him to come out. In the mean time I want to ask you a few questions, Rosie. You used to do writing for his daughter, did you not?"

"Yes, sir. She couldn't write on account of her hand."

"I know. Do you remember of writing a letter to Martin Hopkins while Doctor Mortimer was on trial for murder, in which this woman claimed to be the murderer of Roger Clayburn?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you understand about that letter? That she was really guilty of the murder?"

"I thought she was."

"She never told you anything different, did she?"

"No, sir."

"You remember signing the letter Doretha St. Cloud, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You knew that was not her name, did you not?"

"Yes, sir. But she told me to sign that name to it."

"Did you ever write any letters for the real Miss St. Cloud?"

"Yes, sir, lots of them. I wrote nearly all her letters."

"How was that? Could she not write?"

"Oh, yes, but she could not write as good a hand as I could, and she was writing to a gentleman a good deal of the time who was very critical about the letters he received, so she wanted them to be as near perfect as possible."

"You are about the old man's cabin here a good deal, are you not, Rosie?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you ever notice him have a gold medal given by Yale College to Mr. Clayburn?"

"Yes, sir. He took it away from you when you were unconscious."

"I know he did, but since then it has been in somebody else's hands. Have you seen it lately?"

"Yes, sir, last night, I think."

"Do you know where it is now?"

"The old man has it in his pocket, I guess. He always carries it there."

"Would you mind showing me the entrance to the tunnel where you started to take me out that time, Rosie?"

"No, sir, I'll show you. But I wouldn't go in there now."

"Why?"

"Old Reuben is in there."

"I don't mind that."

"You know what a time you had with him before?"

"Yes, but I was sick and unarmed that day. However, I think I'll take your advice. Clayburn," continued the detective, turning to the young man, "I will change my plans a little. Instead of talking with the old man about real estate, as soon as we hear him coming up from the tunnel, you go in and entertain him while I go into the tunnel from another direction and get the box."



"Sneak off, then," whispered Clayburn, "as he is coming now."

"All right. Rosie, we will go."

The girl led the way to the entrance to the tunnel, and then at Thad's advice, she left him and went home.

Thad had not gone a dozen yards into the tunnel when it became so dark that he was compelled to light his dark-lantern and flash it ahead of him so that he could see to progress.

As he had experienced before, he found it a long way from the entrance to the other terminus of the tunnel.

But he finally reached it, and looked about for the box.

He flashed the light in every direction, but could see nothing.

At length, however, he noticed a rock in the wall that looked as though it had been recently put there.

A closer examination proved this to be a fact, but the question was how to remove it now.

Thad flashed his light all about the rock, examined every edge, and tugged at it, but still it would not move.

Finally he noticed something that looked like a rivet on one side of the rock.

He was too old a detective not to know what that meant.

Thad put his thumb against the rivet and pushed.

The next instant the rock moved a little at first, and then swung out from its bed, revealing a neat little niche in the rocky wall.

Flashing his light inside the opening, Thad was gratified to see the object of his search, the strong box!

It did not take him long to lift the box out of the niche and start on his return to the entrance of the tunnel.

Meeting with no resistance, he was at the entrance again inside of half an hour.

Mounting the hill again and whistling for Clayburn, the latter came out, and the two started back toward the village.

"Well, we have the box anyway," observed the detective as they went along, "and as for the medal I do not see that it makes much difference about that, unless you wish to recover it as a memento of your brother. It makes no difference to the case. I understand its connection with the case, and that is sufficient. If you do not want it, we may as well let the poor old chap keep that for all his woes."

"I have no desire to take it away from him," rejoined Clayburn indifferently. "In fact, the thing has grown to be hateful to me."

This remarkable outburst caused Thad to open his eyes, but he did not reply to it, and the two men walked on in silence.

When they reached the village Thad said:

"I think we had as well go to the office of Doctor Mortimer to open the box, as he is interested in it as much or more than anybody else."

"Just as you say," responded Clayburn, who seemed to have lost all interest in everything.

Again they proceeded in silence until they reached the office of Dr. Mortimer.

The doctor was in and anxiously awaiting Thad's return.

"Well, here we are," said Thad, setting down the box. "It was not so much of a job as I thought it would be. Clayburn here put me on to it."

The doctor glanced at Clayburn with a look of surprise.

He evidently had in mind what Thad had said about the young man, and imagined Thad referred in some way to that.

"I mean," continued the detective, "that he told me where I would be the most likely to find it."

"Oh," exclaimed the doctor with a sigh of relief. "Well, let us get it open and see what is inside."

"That's what we will," ejaculated Thad, putting the box upon the table and taking out his bunch of keys. "We shall soon see what there is in it."

With that he inserted a key and a moment later the box was open.

It was filled with miscellaneous papers, which Thad removed one at a time and laid down on the table, and which was taken up in turn by first Mortimer and then Clayburn and examined and laid down again.

This had gone on for some time.

Not a word had escaped anybody.

Nothing up to that time had appeared to interest any of them.

Finally Thad came to a paper which he pondered over a good while, opened and glanced over its contents, and at length said:

"Here it is."

"What?" demanded both men in a single voice.

"The will of old Maxwell, bequeathing all his property to Doretha St. Cloud and Eldridge Mortimer!"

For some strange reason Clayburn had suddenly become infatuated with another paper still lying in the box.

He had not touched it, but his eyes were riveted on it, and his face had suddenly assumed an ashen hue.

And then when he imagined Thad engaged

with the other document the young man attempted to steal the paper unnoticed.

Thad caught him in time, however, just as the fellow was trying to get the paper into his pocket, and laid hands on it.

Not a word passed between them, but a swift intelligent glance was exchanged that told volumes to both.

The doctor was too much engrossed with the will to notice the transaction.

Thad took the paper, which proved to be only a letter, and opening it, glanced over its contents.

He understood then why Clayburn did not want him to see it.

The letter was as follows:

"MY DEAR REUBEN:

"The time has come for you to carry out the job we talked about. Roger will be at the house of Miss St. Cloud to-night until a late hour, and will have to pass through the grove on his way home.

"Be there and I will meet you with the proper weapon.

"I will pay you a thousand dollars for the job as soon as we get the will made out to me on the death of my father, which may occur any time, and I will be heir to everything as soon as you do your work.

"Aside from the money, you know you have a grievance of your own to avenge. Did he not take the medal which rightfully belonged to your poor boy, and send the latter to a suicide's grave? And did he not ruin your daughter? Are not these enough to stir your father's heart to the core, and spur you on to any deed?

"I have always hated him, and will do it myself if you do not, but knowing what wrongs you have to be righted, I would feel that I had wronged you worse than my brother has if I did not allow your hand to direct the fatal steel or fire the fatal shot.

"Be in the grove not later than ten. He will probably pass about eleven. I will be there with the pistol about ten.

"Don't fail.

ROBERT CLAYBURN."

When Thad looked up from his reading he found Robert had fainted in his chair.

The doctor had been so much engrossed that he had not noticed it.

Thad sprang up and ran toward the unconscious man, and that caused the doctor to look up.

"What's this?" he demanded, running to Robert's side. "The boy is not well. The walk was too much for him."

With that the doctor proceeded to examine the patient.

He examined his pulse, put his hand on his heart and at length put his ear down on the unconscious man's side.

An instant later the doctor raised his head and the detective saw that the color had left his face.

"Dead!" he ejaculated in a hollow voice.

Thad made no reply, but shrugged his shoulders significantly.

The doctor interpreted this to mean a question as to what had caused his death, for he answered:

"Heart disease, perhaps."

Thad shrugged his shoulders again and tossed the doctor the letter.

The latter glanced hastily over it and then sunk down into a chair.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Had I known that it would have ended thus I would have borne the odium to the end of my days, rather than have my best friend branded as a murderer, and that too of his own brother. It is terrible!"

As he ceased to speak Miss St. Cloud and Cousin Charlie came in, and were surprised and horrified to find where the blame of the murder had been at last located by the baffling clues of a Blind Trail.

THE END.

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